



The Balmore Hoard

- exciting new evidence that the ISB really existed

*Celebrity
Interviews*

- Mike Heron and
Bruce Findlay

*Monkey
Memoir*

- When Stone met String

*View from
the Amps*

- A Stringman writes

*The Cover
of Myrrh*

- We name the
guilty people

BEGLIAD9

for the song has no ending

A CELEBRATION OF THE INCREDIBLE STRING BAND PAST AND PRESENT

To accompany the 5000 Spirits feature, I thought it would be interesting to print a couple of songs which didn't make it on to the album. Born in your Town is soaked in North African riffs and modal scales, and Lover Man, musically more straightforward, was featured on Al Stewart's first LP. Both will be on the new CD. Illo by Allan Frewin

BORN IN YOUR TOWN

Born in your town on this young morning
Oh certainly I have good luck coming
Sadly sadly have I mourned, making heavy my burden
Such toils to entwine me
no more
to endure them
A lover is to me
She is my companion
Six strings at my hand, to the morning I tuned them
Oh warm room I have and a warm place for sleeping
Black coffee to waken me
No more to be dreaming
The wings of the albatross long since I saw him
The hair of the goats as they walk to the island
In the hands of the watches a page is turned over
And the echoes flow on, rippling on
On the face of the river.
What would I wish for if wishing were having
In the streets of your town I see nothing worth stealing
For autumn speaks leaves to the lost deeps for ever
And the clouds echo on, echoing on,
On the face of the river.

Robin Williamson

LOVER MAN

Baby come tell me 'bout your tree house
And your candy-striped pet mouse
And your car that has feet
Hey come tell me 'bout your eyebrows that meet
And my baby, won't you tell me 'bout your chilblains
And your right eyeball's growing pains
And your purple tractor that sings
Hey come tell me all of those things
*But if you want to tell me some more
Think you can
Oh babe, tell me 'bout your lover man
You know I am talking 'bout him
He's one that's strutting around each time I get out of town
You know the one that I mean
He's the one that's stealing my scenecream
Hey baby I'm talking 'bout him
Hey baby, won't you tell me 'bout your black rose
And the garden where your love grows
Among the cabbages and beans
Hey tell me why your primroses are green...*

Mike Heron

beGLAD9

for the song has no ending

beGLAD 9 is published by Taproot Productions and edited by Adrian Whittaker, with valuable help from Deena Omar, Raymond Greenoaken and Andy Roberts.

Cover design by Jas Wetherspoon and Byron Lizzard. Thanks to City and Islington College DTP tutors and students who put up with me occupying a work-station and bugging them for advice - especially Joe McConnell, Martin Ford, Lyn, Raz, Colin & Chris. Thanks also to Arlette.

In theory, beGLAD is published on 1 May and 1 November (forgive the delays in getting this issue to you—life is complicated). Issue 10 will be edited by Raymond; all contributions should be addressed to him at the address below. The featured album will be **I Looked Up**. 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.

SUBSCRIPTIONS, BACK ISSUES, INFORMATION, GOSSIP

Contact: Raymond Greenoaken, 11 Ratcliffe Road, Sheffield S11 8YA.

Tel: 0114 2661158.

And if you're interested in the out-of-print issues, they'll soon be available in electronic form on the Website.

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Editorial

It's a bit daunting, being the third successive editor in as many issues... I hope you will forgive the delay in publication, caused by limitations in my access to Quark at work (hello and thanks to all DTP tutors!) and the fact I've had to learn it from scratch.

What's really pleased me about this issue is that it's very participatory - most of it has been written by the readership rather than by me, Raymond or Andy. That's really worth celebrating, I think, although we still need more women writers! In general, I'd like to say that there's not an editorial "standard" you have to live up to - variety and an individual voice are more important.

One thing I've tied to feature in this issue is original artwork - it's another area in which you can participate - and I'd like to thank Steve and Deena in particular for the energy they put into the graphics I "commissioned". The featured LP in "my" next issue will be Hard Rope, and I look forward to your visual interpretations of Dreams of No Return and Ithkos, in particular. You've got 9 months, so start sketching now!

On a personal note, I've now paid off the entirety of the Back Again debt - huge thanks to all those who wrote in with donations or bought the HBGD tape - heart-warming stuff.

Finally, a word on the magazine's finances. Owing to sterling work by Raymond and a lot of favours by various DTP mates, we've been able to hold prices and increase quality. So no subs increase, at least not for this year!

Love, Adrian

Exploding Galaxy - The Art Of David Medalla - Guy Brett (Kala Press) (See Edward Pope, page 36)

This beautifully illustrated and produced book takes you through the amazingly diverse career of David Medalla, founder of the Exploding Galaxy. Assessments of him vary - "old-fashioned surrealist", "transcendental hedonist" and "inexhaustible, imaginative artist" are some of the book's epithets - but his long career has always been innovative. After an early start as a "boy wonder" in the Philippines, Medalla set out to retrace the footsteps of Rimbaud, arriving in 1960 England via Djibouti, Addis Ababa and Aden.

His theories are particularly interesting if looked at from the ISB's late 60's perspective of inclusivity and multi-genre projects. Brett says his work in this period "explores the possibility of interplay between the creative artist and the passive spectator, the 'street' and museum view of culture, etc. In Medalla's own words:

"I thought: why not create a situation where dance, poetry, singing, painting and sculpture could cooperate and penetrate each other as they did in the great historical cultures? And with that intention I went round London in the beginning of 1967 and invited all interested...I (named it) Exploding Galaxy as I thought this name sufficiently flexible to contain and inspire all sorts of activities."

Ring any bells?

The group's famous house at 99, Balls Pond Road functioned without electricity, gas or phone, and he neighbours and press were often hostile. As Edward says in the book "everyone of us became a walking justification of his own life". After the Galaxy's dissolution, Medalla went on to work in a huge variety of performance and painting contexts, which there's no room to detail here, I'm afraid. You'll have to buy the book. It's available for £18.95 from Kala Press, PO Box 3509, London NW6 3 PQ. A.W.

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Rehearsal video

I'm still in discussion with Sheila Archibald on the possible release of this - please send me a s.a.e. if you're interested unless you've already done so - Adrian

String Covers Competition

Perhaps the biggest 'names' these days who are known ISB fans are The Pet Shop Boys, KLF and Plant & Page.. An amazingly rare vinyl prize (so rare I'm still looking for it!) is offered for the **best hundred words** on which ISB song one of these could cover and how they might arrange it! Closing date: 28 February 1997, entries to Adrian. As usual, I'll pass on suggestions to Joe Boyd as part of the campaign for an "official" tribute CD.

beGLAD NEWS

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



Clive outside his house in Brittany (photo by Gina)

HELLO FROM HUELGOAT...

...which is where Clive Palmer lives these days (it's in Brittany). He's hoping to organise some more English gigs - if anyone is interested in promoting one write c/o Adrian and I'll pass it on. Clive's been making bagpipes recently and has started to play them; apart from that he's been "getting the vegetable garden together and piling up wood for the winter." Sadly, the C.O.B. CD reviewed last issue is a bootleg from which Clive will receive no royalties at all - so boycott it!

HERON ON WAY TO MILLION SELLER!

Manfred Mann's Earth Band has a Greatest Hits out now - selling well round Europe, particularly in Scandinavia! As it has shifted some 800,000 "units" to date, their version of Don't Kill It Carol is netting Mike some welcome royalties. Not quite as much as he should get, however: on the basis of having changed the lyrics from *this red rose to this wild flower*, Manfred craftily negotiated a percentage of the songwriting royalties...

ROBIN ROLLS FURTHER ON

The book Celtic Bards, Celtic Druids (by Robin and Bob Stewart) should be in the shops as you read this. Review in the next issue. Meanwhile, he's been to Rome to take part in Italy's first major post-war storytelling event, entitled something like Narrating Voices. Courtesy of the British Council, he and colleague Matthew Harvey did a couple of sessions at the Museum of Modern Art. He played up the visual side to get the stories across, though he also did a children's event with line by line translations! On the

recording front, he plans to revisit the studio this winter for an as yet unspecified project.

Tour dates:

11.12.96 Brighton (Arts Club)
21.12.96 Hazelwood House, Devon
22.12.96 The Wharf, Tavistock

Check venues/times before setting off!

Late news: More tour dates & CD review on page 18.

5000 SPIRITS DEMO TAPE

Mark Anstey has now transferred the best bits of these tapes to DAT in preparation for a release next year. In the process, he's solved a few mysteries - My Own Bone is actually a working title for Puppies and Mountain of God is simply the WTBH version. However, the tapes included a number of substantially different versions of 5000 Spirits songs, including Eyes of Fate, Mad Hatter, Gently Tender and Little Cloud. Also, Blues for the Muse, which includes an extra verse along the lines of "I'm not a prize-fighter, I'm just a lamplighter." Impressively, there's an early but fully formed version of Iron Stone with Robin playing all the sitar parts on his guitar and an extra verse involving Merlin and world-wide stag hunting - very White Goddess. The song is quite wonderful - conclusive proof that he was indeed a genius of this parish.

FELIX DE-MYSTIFIED

The Felix show pictured last issue was the pilot for the series, hence not broadcast. In an October '67 Melody Maker interview Julie referred to this and mentioned that the ISB did a song "about 5 minutes long". Now as Little Cloud is four minutes on the studio LP and live versions often get stretched a bit, the chances are Raymond was right.

"LA INCREDIBLE"

Cuando la mañana de tus ojos penetra en mis sombras

Dejando apenas un rastro de sueño crepuscular...

By a strange piece of synchronicity, Deena and I got back from a holiday in Northern Spain to find a bundle of cuttings from Jaume Papell about the Spanish career of "La Incredible". Liquid Acrobat was the first LP to be released there, but the ISB didn't play in Spain till 1973, when the failing Franco dictatorship began to relax the harsh censorship laws. In fact, they were one of the first major bands to play there, performing at the rather splendid Palau de la Musica, in Barcelona, normally reserved for classical concerts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the band got an ecstatic reception. Mike remembers that the expectations and the superb hall pushed them to play a "fantastic gig". More recently, Robin played a solo Spanish tour, and there are tentative plans for Mike's band to play there next Spring.

Hasta luego!

PS. Did you recognise Painting Box in español?

HUNGRY GHOSTS IN FAME BID SHOCK!

Mike was on the judges panel for one of the heats in a songwriters' contest at this year's Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Norman Lamont's entry won (no trace of nepotism, he assures us) and went on to take second prize in the grand final. As their prize, the band will be doing a radio session for BBC Radio Scotland's "Jump the Queue" and some London gigs at Bunjies.

MYSTICS STILL SWIMMING

Still no news on an American release for Mike's last CD, though sales in the UK have been good. Sales figures up to June 96 showed that Mike had just about recouped his advance.

LYRICS: M. HERON - MUSIC: J. CASH?

Not so likely as the news of the 'Bug' publishing deal implied. (See last issue). The main reason for the Bug deal was to get them to help arrange an American release for "Mystics" (they're still trying). If Mike actually gets a deal and does an American tour, then some co-writing might happen - otherwise it's unlikely.

BE GLAD ON THE NET

<http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/town/square/ac455/> is the address for Martin Payne's ISB Website (see No. 8). Currently about 100 people per week visit the site, which features everything from personal reminiscences by fans through to discographies and more up-to-date reviews than this mag can ever deliver! It's also a source of current tour date information. Latest project: out-of-print *beGLADs* will soon be available here in electronic form. Check it out!

LAST ISSUE'S GREAT COMPETITION

The answers - the winner

There was only a modest trickle of entries for the competition, which challenged the massed intellects of Stringfandom to guess the solution to a riddle composed by Robin. The answer, in fact, is a multiple one, and concerns birds associated in folklore and fact with the months of the year. The roll-call, in its natural order, is as follows: Robin, Magpie, Swallow, Cuckoo, Nightingale, Eagle, Hawk, Grouse, Crow, Wild Goose, Barn Owl, Wren.

The only entrant to guess the full complement was Ralph Harris of Hex End, Newcastle upon Tyne. A special String-related prize to you, sir! - don't smoke it all at once...

WILD WYOMING AND BEYOND

US and Canadian readers can now buy all ISB/Williamson/Heron CDs and limited editions from Michael Ranauro, Lordly Nightshade Productions, P.O. Box 380775, Cambridge, MA 02238-0775, USA. Michael will also be stocking copies of *beGLAD*. Telephone 617-422-1929, Fax 617-988-2016, Email: ranauro @ fas.harvard.edu

REISSUES

Mark is still pushing for CD reissues of Be Glad and U. No response from WEA, but Demon is considering a deal with Island to bring out Be Glad For The Song Has No Ending.

SEID DOCH FROH - DAS LIED WIRD FORTGESETZT

ISB were the subject of a four-page retrospective in the German edition of Rolling Stone (June 96). Today's youth, on a "soft ambient and sitar trip", might get into the two new solo CDs, says Frank Sawatzki, and wonders if Mike and Robin will be "the giants of the post-techno era"... Much of what follows are the same old quotes, though there are some cute thumbnail sketches; Williamson - "allegorical folk weirdo", Heron - "youthful, more extrovert pop genius". Perhaps the most memorable bit is where Sawatzki describes Robin's voice as "oscillating effortlessly between the humming of angels, blues shouters and the singing of an Elizabethan lute-player, and which is transported into some kind of spiritual Elysium as occasion demands". Jaja!



"Wee" Tam White is to be seen in a minor role in "Braveheart"...brief cover of Black Jack David by traditional trio Prism on their 1995 CD Dancing Lights...Robin's Legacy

of the Scottish Harpers is on Claddagh CCF12CD...Kip of the Serenes is now available on CD at the correct speed... Billy Connolly has recorded Log Cabin for his new TV series...Anyone who would like to help Steve Blamires rebuild his lost collection of ISB tapes see small ad below...1974 Live LP now in stock at Scientology HQ...Following all the references in Revolution in the Head we attempted to commission an "ISB & the Beatles" article from Mark Lewisohn - he knows of no concrete links at all...Way Back in the 1960's/ Chinese White were issued as a single in June 1967... Chinese White was performed on Late Night Line-Up (BBC2) in summer 1967...Robot Blues was la meilleur disque de la semaine on France Inter's Pop Club in 1970...Not happening - Mike's Purcell Room gig and Coppola using Mexican Girl for On The Road...From banjos to bass bins - Chrissie Quayle of the Temple Creatures now leading light in The Doctors Of Dub, roots rockin' in day-glo costumes...Giant Moth, an early Alex Harvey-fronted psychedelic band, released Maybe Someday as a Decca single in 1967

Obituaries

Two friends of the ISB died this October. Roy Guest was an ex-folkie turned promoter who set up many ISB tours and gigs, including the Pop Proms at the Albert Hall and U at the Roundhouse. John Bauldie, best known as editor of the Dylan fanzine, the Telegraph, was also an ISB fan, contributing several reviews of the rereleases to Q magazine. We'll miss them both.

Robin Williamson Songs for the Kalendarium

A limited edition CD of Robin live in concert at the Vernissage, Darmstadt. It is limited to 250 CDs worldwide so it's first come first served. Songs include Good as Gone, October Song and Witches Hat.

Cheques, postal orders or IMOs (£14.99 UK, £15.99 rest of the world) to Unique Gravity at 196 Old Road, Brampton, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 3QW, U.K.

Also out soon: Merry Band live at McCabe's (farewell concert, 1979)

*Gimmel & Daleth's
half-remarkable queries
You ask 'em, we answer 'em
- a peek into the dark cupboard
where the anoraks hang out*

Dear Gimmel and Daleth,
Hold your Fire (see no. 8) isn't a Mike Heron song at all - it's the title track of Patto's excellent first LP. Tom Alder.

G&D: Sorry about that - what with a lifetime of shifting black castles and white queens about and all that standing between, we sometimes get a bit confused.

Dear Gimmel and Daleth,
To answer the question regarding ISB songs - I have the following demos recorded by Mike at Glen Row towards the end of the ISB gathering dust on my shelves. I believe they were recorded prior to Hard Rope and Silken Twine as the tapes also contain a demo of Maker of Islands and Jane - Belinda (you can hear Mike's chair creaking on this one)

Crooner
Takes My Breath Away (Mike lost this one and tried to re-write it from memory and came up with the song Isn't it Amazing).

Christ, What a Birthday! (Not sure when this one was recorded as it's on a different tape to the others).

Poetry Play does exist in the vaults at Island, though it's shown as Mime Play. Can your readers shed any light on the following ISB songs - Budgie Song, I'm Free Minor, I'm Free Major, Hallucination Collage, Curlew (Curlew?), Cello Song, Time Has Told Me, Crazy Girl? They are listed as being in the vaults at Island Records - should keep every one guessing for a while.

Mark Anstey

G&D: We reckon they're by Nick Drake or John Martyn actually. Any suggestions?

Small ads

ISB tapes wanted - your list gets mine. Allan Frewin, 23E Lawrie Park Road, Sydenham, London SE26 6DP.

ISB tapes wanted - your list gets mine. Steve Blamires, PO Box 20927, Juneau, AK 99802, USA.

ISB ephemera for sale. Paper goods, tapes. Write for list. Andy Roberts, 84 Elland Road, Brighouse, West Yorks HD6 2QR.

allwrit down

more ISB namechecks from the world of literature

assembled by Raymond Greenoaken

CASTING THE STONE

Alan Jackson up in Newcastle gave us a String Alert concerning the *Guardian* and *Big Issue* columnist C.J. Stone's book *Fierce Dancing*, an exploration of Alternative Culture. Chapter 13, ominously entitled *1974*, features some sour ruminations on the ISB, provoked by an encounter with Rose Simpson in a North Wales pub. An abbreviated account of this incident appeared in C.J.'s erstwhile *Guardian* Weekend column, *Housing Benefit Hill*.

C.J., it seems, loathed the early '70s—the drugs ("It was all so squalid"), the ersatz spirituality ("Everyone had something to sell you,"), and, more than anything, the fact that he was an enthusiastic participant in it all. The ISB, we learn, summed up for him the whole sad, misdirected, self-deluding awfulness of the era. Seeking enlightenment as a young chap, he "listened to the Incredible String Band and tried to make sense of the convolutions of their blank-verse lyrics." Get a life, the C.J. of the '90s reproves his gullible '70s self.

Then he bumped into Rose, and when someone discreetly informed him she was a former String ("She doesn't like to talk about it," hissed the mark), arranged a meeting with her. Surprisingly, C.J. seems to have been totally unaware of the media circus surrounding Rose at the time—as detailed in *beGLAD* 8. He quizzes Rose about alternative lifestyles, about acid, about Scientology, and detects a self-protective evasiveness in her responses. "No matter what questions I asked, she merely philosophised the answers," he pouts. "There was no attempt to get through to the spirit of the age."

As C.J. reports the conversation, Rose is possessed of a steely, humourless eloquence that smacks more of a rent-a-quote media pundit than a famed Oriental bass player. A suspicion begins to form that her pronouncements may not have been reproduced entirely verbatim. "Acid was seen as a philosophical/experimental tool." Does that sound like conversation to you? Who do you know that speaks in diagonal slashes?

"In the entire conversation," C.J. concludes, "I never detected one glimmer of affection for the period... She should have been having a laugh, having fun, going out with people, dancing all night... Instead of which, it was all po-faced worthiness and dreary philosophy." Compare and contrast Rose in *beGLAD* 8: "There was a lot of fun to it... It was lovely—no regrets at all, it was really great." Will the real Rose Simpson

please stand up?

Anyway, let's allow C.J. his final flourish. "Everything she said represented everything I hated about the era. All that philosophical jargon. All that po-faced, gelatinous, meaningful, life-enhancing gobbledygook." Guess he never quite learned the song...



NOBODY LEAVES THE ROOM

Stringheads might be surprised to learn that the ISB's influence has permeated the crepuscular world of crime fiction. Elmore Leonard, the septuagenarian grand panjandrum of the genre, namechecks our heroes in his 1988 novel *Freaky Deaky*. The chief protagonists in this "punchy, aggressive and entertaining" yarn are "'60s leftover Robin Abbott and hippy turned yuppie Mark Ricks". Robin and Mark?—close, but not close enough. However, during one of the many passages in which assorted characters recall their late '60s adventures—especially at Woodstock—we encounter this exchange (page 200):

Miss Abbott said, "You were at Woodstock?"

"In the rain and the mud, all three days."

"I really wanted to go, but I had something on."

"You had to be there to believe it,"

Chris said. "Half a million people sitting there all wet and nobody cared. Saturday I got to see my all-time favourite, Grace Slick. I saw Janis, the Who, Santana. On Sunday, Joe Cocker. He had stars on his boots. You remember Ten Years After? Alvin Lee?"

"They were at Goose Lake, the next summer," Miss Abbott said. "You remind me of a guy, a friend of mine. He'll go, 'You remember Licorice? Who was she with?'"

"The Incredible String Band," Chris said.

They were grinning at each other.

Elmore has certainly done his homework, spelling Licorice's name correctly. And yes, Joe Cocker did have stars on his boots.

Speaking of which, the Scottish writer Val McDermid is a rising star in the crime writing firmament. Over the past decade, Val has turned out a string of successful whodunits with a feminist slant, variously featuring lesbian journalist and amateur sleuth Lindsay Gordon, and feisty

woman detective Kate Brannigan. Her taut psychological thriller *The Mermaids Singing* scooped the Crime Writers' Association's Golden Dagger Award for 1995. Look to your laurels, Elmore!

Now *beGLAD* has incontrovertible evidence that, in her Oxbridge days back in the early '70s, Val was a Stringhead and proud of it. Her guitar and the first ISB songbook were her constant travelling companions. Your reporter knew her briefly at the time, and met her again last month during Sheffield's *Off The Shelf* literature festival. Val confirmed that the ISB remain close to her heart, and confided that she still nursed the hurt of having her copy of *No Ruinous Feud* half-inched back in 1976. Rumour has it, indeed, that her first, unpublished, novel bore the title *Painted Chariot*.

Though no reports have reached us of any overt references to the ISB in the McDermid canon, we'll be monitoring her future output closely. Check it out yourself, too—we're talking String solidarity here.



JOB'S MIDLIFE CRISIS

In this summer's *Telegraph*—that's the Dylan mag, not the voice of the saloon-bar Tory—Roy Kelly profiles the ageing Dylan devotee thusly:

"That post-war baby bulge became a teenage lump, which sagged into a middle-aged pot belly. It's still around, like an antelope moving slowly through a python. We're all still here, hardly anyone has gone away, all waiting, procrastinating and buying boxed sets."

Bob's Tears, anyone?



McGARRULOUS

The McGarrigles, too, have dipped into the Williamson thesaurus. Credits on 1992's *Heartbeats*

Accelerating include thanks to a barman called Roger Beaulieu: "Night after night and into the 'sick, sad morning' (thank you Incredible String Band) Roger has played us the music he lives to..."

Not many people know that Robin actually puts in an appearance on the first McGarrigles LP, singing a bit of chorus on the final track. This reputedly came about as a result of a chance meeting with Joe Boyd in New York while the album was being cut.



Sharon Lewis (left) and Natasha Jones

'A POOKA IS

superficially attractive, ultimately treacherous'...was how Time Out summed them up at the time of their first LP. Since then Pooka have played an impressive amount of festivals and gigged in New York. The last Ultramarine CD, *Bel Air* (on Blanco y Negro) featured Sharon and Natasha as backing vocalists on 4 tracks. One reviewer commented: "Any song that includes the lyrics 'his genitals are pingpong balls' sung like several Bjorks in angelic harmony isn't likely to be forgotten easily." Hmm. They've also added occasional bass, drums and keyboards to their live set and recorded a new album for *Rough Trade* (still imminent, still called *Spinning*.)

I've seen them several times with and without the band, and though the rhythm section definitely adds a surge of energy to tunes like *Lubrication* (off the new CD), I've come to the conclusion that live, I prefer them as a duo. There's a real spark between Natasha and Sharon as they tune their harmonies in on each other, a potent fusion of voices and personalities which is dissipated in a bigger format. And part of the essence of Pooka is quirky, fiddly, complex arrangements which the full band tend to smooth over and iron out.

Sweet *Butterfly*, the first single from *Spinning*, was a typically Pooka-ish contrast - a lyrical ode to the butterfly's emergence from the chrysalis (*kissing you is like rubbing my face against freedom*) set to an incredibly harsh and jarring rhythm. There's a strong underlying feeling of menace, fragile beauty endangered. And what's that Sharon sings at the end - *See how my need comes to rape you*..

The current single *The Insect* seems to be about an obsessional love affair in which the singer (Natasha, I think) sees herself as a bug crawling after the man concerned. It's a tale of morbid fascination - too much Kafka at an impressionable age, I reckon. The song starts with a lot of keening, edgy close vocal harmonies, and moves into percussive

overdrive in the middle where the band comes in. Quite remarkable; it was rightly voted the Observer single of the week!

More on Pooka in the next issue - maybe *Spinning* will finally have appeared and, at the least, Deena Omar promises a Pooka interview! A.W.

SHOWRES SOOTE

Grahame Hood's other band, *The Flying Chaucers*, have a CD out titled *Common Currency*. It's an instrumental selection featuring some very professional playing of traditional tunes and reels (including the old Williamson chestnut *The Blackbird*). The line up is fairly untraditional, including Appalachian dulcimer, melodeon and synthesizer amongst the more predictable violins and whistles.

£10 inc. p&p to Grahame at 41, Bromley Gardens, BROMLEY Kent BR2 0ES. A.W.

WEST

High summer for me this year was a trip down to West Cornwall and an afternoon ramble along scented coastal footpaths past mythical cliffs and bays en route to see a truly marvellous band. One of the leading lights of West is Pete Berryman, who recorded one of my all time favourite albums; *Sunshine Possibilities* with Clive and others as the Famous Jug Band in 1969.

Pete's highly singular and enchanting guitar playing is a potent feature of West's recently released first album, which includes Cornwall's winning entry in the 1996 International Pan Celtic Song Contest. The song is called *An Arvor* meaning 'the shore'. It is sung partly in the Cornish language and Pete describes the song as: "the shore being the edge of two worlds and probably about being drawn to the physical world by desire and at the same time awakening to the spiritual."

The songs are sung by Cathy Stephens and her singing skills shine radiantly through the album as she glides from Cornish into English. A particular favourite is *Under a*

Reviews

Summer Sky, which represents Cornish dream-time and has become the theme music on my mind for many a wild moorland ramble.

The talents of Adrian O'Reilly on guitar and Keith Marshall on peramion are many and varied and in the gig included a cheek slapping solo from Keith at one stage.

Virtual G'nness has the band playing melodies and rhythms in waves and crescendos with soaring and interweaving voicework from Cathy. This song seems to peak with a sequence that is, to borrow a phrase of Andy Roberts, a "kaleidoscopic mandala of sound" evoking memories of the *Grateful Dead* at their most cosmic.

Breow Pri/Hills of Clay is another nugget of a song about the china clay industry in mid Cornwall which gives life (Pete's grandfather worked in the clay industry), and takes it away through its effect on the environment. The song is also a call to be vigilant: "the deals are made and before you know it, it's gone"..

Available from: The Granary, Causeway Head Steet, Penzance, Cornwall. £5.50 inc. p&p. Tony Corden

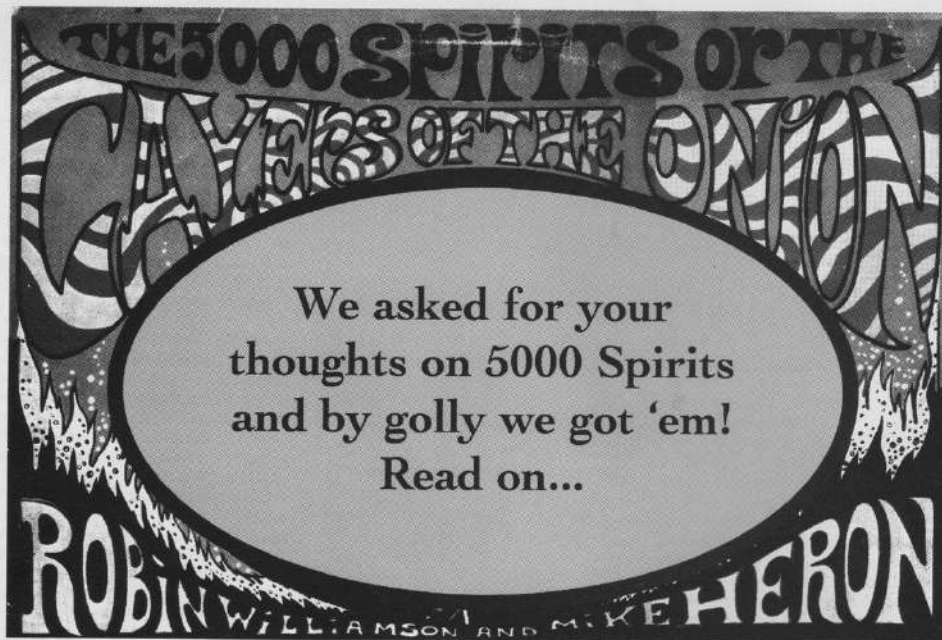
THE PINE & THE EAGLE

Let's be clear, this is not Malcolm's next album. This is an educational resource for which Malcolm wrote and performed the music. The liner notes say it is "an interactive musical drama celebrating the richness and variety of Scotland's natural heritage. It is an environmental story spanning twelve thousand years, from the last Ice Age up to the present day."

Aimed at children, the music nevertheless has a wider appeal. Some of the songs are very lightweight - "I'm a Little Midgie", a twelve-bar blues about being, well, a little midgie, for example. But others are more serious. "The Funeral of a Bear" describes the extinction of that noble species in Scotland, and asks "which one of us will be the next, to slip away, forever?"

A real favourite with all of my family is "We are Sheep". Living in an area devastated by sheep overgrazing, I suppose the song would appeal anyway, but that apart, it could have taken the place of, say, "Liner" on *Nothing Strange*. But the gem of the collection must be the title track, "The Pine and the Eagle". This is well up to *Nothing Strange* standards and really must be on Malcolm's next major release.

Beside the songs, the soundtrack features a narration, written by Pete Baynes and spoken by Sara Best and Colin Scott Moncrieff (who sounds very like Robin in story-telling mode, at times.) "The Pine and the Eagle" is available on cassette only, from The Scottish Natural Heritage (01738 627921), at £5. Martin Williams



**SONGS FROM
PLANET
GIMBRI -
Raymond
Greenoaken sets
the album in a
stylistic context:**

It was Summer '67, forever enshrined in the lexicon of journalistic clichés as The Summer Of Love. Ah yes, I remember it well: the Six Day War, the Nigerian invasion of Biafra, fighting on the streets of Hong Kong, "negro riots" throughout the US, Peking and Canton devastated by Mao's Red Guards, the usual shenanigans in Vietnam... Peace, man!

But we had other things to occupy our idealistic young minds through those soft summer days. Flower Power was at the height of its pomp; we sang about going to San Francisco as though it were just a 37 bus ride away, and raided municipal flower beds to garland our luxuriant locks. Change was in the air—everything seemed possible.

Events were soon to expose the fragility of our dreams, of course. But, during that summer which promised so much and delivered so little, a young man sat in a London recording studio, drew a double bass

bow across the strings of a battered Moroccan lute, and sent me on a thirty-year journey of musical discovery.

Admit it: unless you were among the privileged few who had actually seen the Incredible String Band in concert around that time, you wouldn't have known a gimbri from a gladius. There must have been many of us who studied the rainbow-hued phantasmagoria that was the 5000 Spirits sleeve and wondered what manner of creature a "bowed gimbri" might be.

If ever an album sleeve said "Buy me!", 5000 Spirits was that sleeve; but I was 15, still at school, and my pocket money just about stretched to a few superhero comics and the Football Monthly. I only bought one album in the entire year—the Stones' Satanic Majesties. Better the devils you know, I thought, quite unaware of the ISB influence reputedly at work on that record. It wasn't until early 1968 that I finally got my hands on a copy of Spirits, and once the stylus landed on the groove, all was revealed.

Side one, track one: Chinese White. A bonny little Heron ditty about the pleasures of the contemplative life. Four introductory bars of staccato guitar, then out of the Dansette's tinny speaker it came—coiling and keening, an ancient, lonesome, unearthly, melancholic wail: the gimbri. I was electrified. It sounded like music from another planet, or conjured from one of those fantastical instruments described by Lord Dunsany in his tall tales of the kingdoms Beyond the Fields We Know—the ninninarb, or the zootibar. But this was the real thing: a gimbri or quint'i, a small North African folk lute associated with the Berber people, and usually played (according to Robin,

answering a reader's query in the Melody Maker) with a plectrum made from a hard native reed. It looks as though Robin was the first person to play it with a bow. So we were hearing an entirely new voice, for all that it sounded like it had come from the morning of the world.

I wanted more of this. I could detect similarities with the Indian dilbuba (as featured on Sergeant Pepper) and the reedy trill of the Renaissance rebec. I later discovered that you could get a vaguely similar noise by bowing an Appalachian dulcimer. Nevertheless, the gimbri was in a class of one. It wasn't the only thing that attracted me to the band, by any means; but it stood as a sort of emblem for the unique, eerie, seductive music of the ISB.

Shortly thereafter, I saw the band in concert for the first time, and witnessed the gimbri in use. The spell was complete. But 5000 Spirits was the door into the glittering dark, and Robin the smiling psychomp* that admitted me to a new realm of sonic experience. (*It's new word a day, the Greeno way! Psychomp is a conductor of souls to the other world -Ed)

There were other exotic sounds in there, of course: the sitar, the oud, the bamboo flute; and even the conventional instruments had an odd edge to them. Robin's guitar, we now know, had been modified to produce a buzzy, sitar-like effect on the upper strings. His playing style, too, was extraordinary. During his sojourn in Fez he'd adapted the style of the Arabian oud to the guitar in a way that was quite unprecedented. Davy Graham had hinted at elements of oud-style in his playing a few years earlier, but Robin's guitar work on The

Eyes Of Fate took it a lot further down the road; No Sleep Blues, Painting Box, The Mad Hatter's Song and First Girl I Loved also included oud-like passages. Other contemporaneous recordings have since turned up in which the oud styling is prominent.

The Joseph Spence Connection

Less well acknowledged is what Mike was doing on guitar at the time. Despite being originally recruited to the band as a "strummer", Mike concentrated on finger-picking styles on the first album and *Spirits*, broadly based on country-blues playing. Close scrutiny of tracks like *Little Cloud* and *Gently Tender*, however, shows something quite new creeping in. Here the picking patterns are syncopated in a way that seems to echo the playing of the legendary Bahaman guitarist Joseph Spence.

Spence's style is, frankly, inimitable. At its most complex it often incorporates several distinct rhythms simultaneously, cunningly syncopated to mesh together indivisibly. Spence was a true original: few guitarists have attempted to follow the stylistic trail he blazed, and of those only Ry Cooder has made it round the first bend. Mike's project, if I'm right in my surmise, was less ambitious. On *Cloud* and *Tender* he plays the vocal line off against the picking pattern, syncopating each at different points in the bar to set up tense cross-rhythms. It's Spence, and yet it ain't... but whatever it is, it's thoroughly beguiling and shows he'd been listening closely to the Bahaman field recordings Elektra had put the band's way.

It's difficult in these days of World Music and hectic, rampant eclecticism to appreciate what a pioneering album *5000 Spirits* was, way back in the 1960s. Eastern influences were de rigueur at the time, but the ISB gave them a startling new spin. Sitar, in particular, were old hat—the Beatles, Stones, Yardbirds, Traffic and Donovan were all twanging away merrily on them. On *Spirits*, however, the instrument was heard for the first time in the hands of an Indian master musician—Nazir Jarazbhoy, the pseudonymous Soma—rather than a Western pop guitarist. The authority of Jarazbhoy's playing on *The Mad Hatter's Song* makes a stern contrast to the diffident efforts of Harrison, Mason et al.

The ISB also broke new ground by drawing inspiration from the musical idioms of N. Africa and the Near East. Hitherto, musicians in search of exotic ingredients to spice up their homely fare had seldom looked further than the subcontinent. Robin's time in Morocco exposed him to the street music of the Rif and Berbers, the ululations of the Muezzins, as well as the classical music of the oud and qanun. These influences clearly seeped into both his playing and composing during that period. On *The Eyes Of Fate*, we can hear the oud-like flurries of notes, the vocal arabesques, and a mournful modality that seems to hint of ancient lunar rites in the caves of the High Atlas. (Another

composition of the time, *Born In Your Town*, offers a similar mélange; probably its stylistic similarity to *Eyes* and *My Name Is Death* kept it off the LP.

From Delhi to the Mississippi Delta; from Baltimore to the Bahamas; from Fez to Planet Gimbrì—*5000 Spirits* was truly a ticket to ride for the flower children of '67. And for me at least it was a one-way ticket: once I'd heard that haunting "animal voice" (as our own Gil Murray once called it) at the beginning of *Chinese White*, I knew there'd be no turning back. I'm still travelling...

Stuart Godfrey fell for the old 'hippy in a VW bus' routine.....

Ah yes, I remember it all (from before...) *5000 Spirits*, the first album I loved. Incredible String Band, the first "group" I loved. *First Girl I Loved* (you guessed it), the first song I loved. How old was I? Well, seventeen of course. Where was I? Not where I should have been - I was supposed to be taking part in the weekly cross-country run favoured by my sports teacher as a sort of character-building exercise for those boys not sufficiently motivated/skilled/fit (stupid?) to play rugby. I had however ended up (muddy trainers, shorts and all) in the wonderfully Bohemian-seeming flat of a good friend (Mick) who, a couple of years older than me, had already left school and parental home and was well into the hippy lifestyle ... 1968 and all that! There were a couple of other sports drop-outs with me; Mick was a kind soul who was happy to let us rest up in his flat for a while and then drop us off (battered VW microbus with 'psychedelic' stickers? - you bet!) near the end of the cross country course.

Mick was a real music aficionado and had a seemingly endless supply of albums and (by no means common in those days) a decent stereo to play them on. Through him I had discovered John Mayall, Chicken Shack, Canned Heat (plus many original bluesmen) - there was also plenty of Dylan, Donovan and other folk stuff...it was all pretty mind-expanding when my total collection at home consisted of Beatles singles, "Sgt. Pepper", "Revolver" and a Joan Baez album! Well, times were hard - I had gone without Airfix kits for six weeks to save enough paper-round money for "Sgt. Pepper".

A knickerbocker glory of multicoloured delights

Anyway, this particular day as I slumped in Mick's tatty but comfy armchair my senses were assailed by a disturbing yet beautiful sound... "First girl I-I loved ... time is come I will sing this sad goodbye song...when I w-as seventeen-en...I used to know you..." I was,

at the time, as desperately "in love" as only a seventeen year old can be. The object of my desire was a nymph-like fledgling hippy chick with (inevitably) long red hair. By the time Robin had got to that line about "me I remember your long red hair...falling in our faces as I kissed you..." I was GONE - I mean big-time. I also remember I cried (real tears!) at the end of that song: "she is pretty ... she's a true friend of mi-ine..." (aaah!-soppy Ed) and the gut-wrenching interplay between Robin's guitar and Danny Thompson's bass.. fortunately my companions were out of the room at the time. What else do I recall from that first hearing? Whimsical images of little clouds and funny hedgehogs ... "hot" blues guitar licks ... sitar and other strange whining or wailing instruments I'd never heard of... "I am the question that cannot be answered..." Who were these guys? I had little time to study the amazing cover for clues... but what a cover! A real knickerbocker glory of multi-coloured delights on the front and a mysterious shot on the back of two enigmatic faces peering out from some sort of undergrowth... strewth, just two of 'em? The flame-embazoned names proclaimed "Robin Williamson" and "Mike Heron" - little did I realise that the names were transposed and so for a long while I believed that Robin was the dark-haired one.. (I wonder how many others fell for that one?). All I knew, and this I cherished in my heart as Mick delivered us (each looking suitably exhausted from our "run") near the finishing point. I loved this album with a desperate passion and I had to possess it. I had enjoyed albums before, been impressed, even thrilled by them, but this was something more. I had to hear it again soon, which I did, prevailing upon Mick's good nature to let me borrow it and tape it (hand-held mike and all) on my auntie's reel-to-reel tape recorder. And I had to buy a copy, which I eventually did, forswearing Airfix kits for ever and even managing to get a loan from my bemused parents as I simply could not wait six weeks...I loved, and still loved, this wonderful album.

All other String Band albums eventually came my way, and all have a special place in my collection and in my affections, but *5000 Spirits* is so special that subjective consideration, even after so many years, is virtually impossible. Sure, the next couple of albums were maybe stronger in terms of breadth, vision and cohesive creative input. "Wee Tam" in particular is a massive achievement, a sustained flight of creative fancy unequalled in popular music. "Hangman's " is just breathtakingly beautiful...and yet, if for some bizarre reason I was forced to relinquish all my ISB albums save one, there would be no contest - *5000 Spirits* it would be with ne'er a second thought. The first album is great, of course - although I confess I didn't hear it until many years later. For most of the Seventies it remained an elusive item, especially in the original "music-shop" sleeve. But brilliant though that debut album undoubtedly was, it still had something believable, attainable about it. There are some wonderful songs,

some quite fascinating images evoked, and a lot of it is plain good fun - but there was never any doubting that it was basically folk club stuff (of the highest order, sire) - the instruments, time signatures, vocals, the whole general approach was more or less familiar. That album could, with some justification, be filed under "Folk...Contemporary". And it remains a spot-on little indicator of what was happening at the sharper end of the progressive folk scene of the mid-sixties.

But what are we to make of 5000 Spirits? This did not seem to come directly from any one identifiable source. The cover alone gave so many apparent "clues" to its meaning that it ended up a complete mystery. And unlike the muted, even severe, tones of the first album cover, this one fairly exploded upon your senses - as did the music! "Psychedelic" was a much used (and abused) term at the time, but even that was so closely identified with the passing fashions of Top of the Pops that it was clearly inadequate for music of such evident consequence as this. Basically I came to the conclusion quite early on that, whatever its roots, the music on this album was pretty much beyond categorising. It is, after all, what it could be, why worry what it should be?

A revisit from Planet Gimbr:

Chinese White ... the first time I guess that many of our sleeping ears were startled by the unique sawing, wailing sound of the bowed gimbr - definitely a sound from some strange, "other" world, and prompting many a vague imagining as to what on earth it looked like - but it fits Mike's strangely beautiful song perfectly. Mike's vocal delivery is strong and controlled, the imagery suitably mysterious ("The bent twig of darkness grows the petals of the morning..." - think about it!) and Robin's stirring harmonies on the "will your magic Christmas tree be sh-i-ning...(hold it!) "...gently..all around" bit.. brilliant. Mike's lovely little guitar figure (DEE dee dee DEE dee dee DEE dee dee DEE - with apologies to the musically literate) was one of the few snippets of music I mastered with my one-string guitar technique (along with "Crossroads" on the bass string, natch!) but somehow it never sounded so good without the gimbr. Anyway, great song, not the "breezy" opener of Bonzo Dog fame but a scene-setter and appetizer par excellence. The title? One of the colours in a painting box (I'm sure it's nothing to do with certain illegal substances)... but more of that later.

No Sleep Blues... aha, a blues song. But what's this, no "woke up this mornin', my woman done gone left me"? Instead it's "delerium nosleepum, in a cloud of nylon foam" (Ex-editor interjection: As I was typing this in I couldn't help but comment on this bit. If No Sleep Blues isn't a song about trying to get to sleep whilst hallucinogens are coursing round the old bloodstream, I'll go buy a hat and eat it. Been there many times) and the dawn "creeping up when it thinks I'm not looking..." and perhaps the most

BRIEF ENCOUNTER - JOHN 'HOPPY' HOPKINS

John Hopkins, whose 16 short bars of recorded fame appear on The Mad Hatter's Song (5000 Spirits) was a legendary 60's mover and shaker. He was one of the founders of International Times, and set up the UFO club with Joe Boyd. I met him at his video training and production company, The Fantasy Factory.

It was Joe, apparently, who suggested a blues piano part on MHS and introduced him to the ISB. Hoppy had originally run into Joe in the States, where he was the Melody Maker photographer at one of the Newport Jazz festivals, and they'd been mates from the time Joe came to set up the London Elektra office. What did Hoppy remember of the session, I asked.

"Not much - I remember feeling nervous and a bit overawed, working with 'real musicians'. They played through the sequence and I rehearsed it a couple of times - in the key of G, I think. Joe would say - keep that bit in, leave that bit out. We recorded it in one take. The whole thing took less than an hour. One of them - Robin I think - had perfect pitch and I was impressed by the way he could sing these strange, North African scales perfectly - it was eerie."

My own image of the 5000 Spirits sessions is of a fog of dope and incense wafting through the studio. Not so, it seems:

"No. There was plenty of dope and incense elsewhere in that period...I was very unfamiliar with all the studio technology - in hindsight I wish I'd paid more attention to that side of it - but it felt more like being in a garage - a clutter of equipment, microphones and cables."

Hoppy thinks he probably got a session fee ("Joe was always very honest and upfront about money") but, sadly, didn't hang around to watch any more of the recording. "5000 Spirits is one of the tapes I play in the car - it triggers strong memories of the time I was running around with Suzy (Creamcheese). Joe was a great talent spotter, and his gift was to be able to take what musicians could do and turn that into a finished record. I think he should be in a hall of fame somewhere!"

Hoppy got involved with video quite early on - 1969, and there have been rumours that he might have old live clips of the ISB. As far as he can remember - and that period was viewed through clouds of smoke - he never did film the ISB.

Adrian Whittaker.

enchanting of Robin's observations in the song when he sings about mixing his feet with water "just to see what could be seen, and the water it got dirty and the feet they got quite clean..." Superbly dextrous guitar from both Robin and Mike and (especially noticeable on the CD) the venerable Danny Thompson giving it some "welly" on the double bass. A crackling little song which rips along in fine style; you can see the links with the first album but Robin's naively profound lyrics lift the song to another, higher level.

Back to Mike for Painting Box, one of the outstanding tracks on an outstanding album and our first meeting with Licorice and her finger cymbals. Danny Thompson is there in manful support again as our heroes sing of a love so special it can only be described in the colours "somewhere in my mind..." OK it is very 1967, but no-one could deny the beauty of the piece with its delicate guitar/flute interplay and lovely harmonies from Robin, Mike and Likky. The less said about the Julie Felix version the better, eh folks! Mike was clearly on top song-writing form with this, followed as it is by the most remarkable (probably) Williamson composition to be heard so far.

Brilliant or Barmy?

The Mad Hatter's Song is the longest piece on the album at five and a half minutes.

Along with "The Eyes Of Fate" it is the most lyrically challenging and musically adventurous song of the collection and would not be out of place among the accomplished compositions found on "Wee Tam". For years I had assumed it was young Mike on the sitar, but it seems sitar and tamboura duties were entrusted to a session muso by the name of Soma, while John Hopkins plays some jazzy piano in the curious "West-meets-East" honky-tonk section juxtaposed with the other-worldliness of "Prometheus, the problem child, still juggling with his brains"...it's the kind of song that does juggle with your brains a bit...is it really as profound as it seems or is it just a bunch of very clever wordplay? Brilliant or barmy? Both, probably. While Robin's apparently profound musings on the meaning (or otherwise) of it all may not stand up to close scrutiny, the whole thing just sounds wonderful and helped establish the String Band (and Robin in particular) as dispensers of prime mythical/magical/wisdom. Sure, it was another time, and maybe we were all too willing to attribute profundity to anything which wasn't obvious, but still this song towers over most of the psychedelic pap which was being served up by all comers at this time.

Wherever the Mad Hatter takes you, it is still a surprise to encounter Mike's "Little

Cloud", the most twee song on the record and either a delight or an embarrassment depending, I guess, on your state of mind at the time. I know it features on many people's hate lists but me, I've never minded it. It certainly sounds like it was fun to do, Robin clearly had fun on the drums and rattles and all of my girlfriends liked it ... it was meant to be a laugh and so it is, leave it alone why don't you! All together now: "YAT-ta-ta-ta TA TA, Ta-ta-ta-ta BOW WOW". Having bashed away happily on drums in Mike's song, Robin is very much more Williamsonsque (as well he might be) on Eyes Of Fate: a sort of "if you thought Mad Hatter's Song was deep, just listen to this" song which again transports the listener to the mysterious recesses of the Williamson imagination. By this stage the album has become something of a roller-coaster ride between different musical styles, held together by the strength of the material and the quality of the production and recording, all well up on the first album.

Blues For The Muse is something of a return to the nimble fretwork and snappy lyrics of No Sleep Blues. Mike blows some trusty harmonica as Robin eulogises (I think) about his guitar, "It's a low special, baby that's enough for me" - is this the lovely Levin? Hedgehog's Song follows...ahh, what sweet memories this lovely little song brings forth. Lightweight it may be, but there's no denying its charm and accessibility. For many people I'm sure this was the first String Band song they actually liked and it was tremendously influential in winning the band a wider audience. Also, and I know it's a "sexist" comment, but girls just seemed to love it! (*boys too!* - Ed). Although it could be accused of plumbng the "cute novelty song" depths (like Little Cloud) it is really far too accomplished and skilful a piece to be so lightly dismissed. And I'm not ashamed to say it is still one of my favourite ISB songs.

I can say little more about First Girl I Loved - an astonishingly mature and accomplished love song of jaw-sagging beauty and an immediate "classic" by any standards..if Robin had never written or performed another song this alone would have ensured him a place among the greats. His guitar playing on this track is outstanding. I would put this song up there with Sandy Denny's Who Knows Where The Time Goes (interesting that Judy Collins covered them both). Just superb.

It Could Have Easily Been A Disaster

Robin gets the oud out for "You Know What You Could Be", a sprightly Heron romp with up-beat lyrics and fluttering flute - Robin (never one to miss an opportunity) has another bash on the drums as well ... not a stand out track but no "bummer" either, it fills a perfectly happy space between "First Girl" and Robin's extraordinarily doomy "My Name Is Death". A classic theme which brings to mind numerous medieval illustrations of Death and the Lady, this could easily have been a disaster: indeed in less

We can but wonder...). The humour is of its time, of course: "we made our own amusement then, going to the pictures" and "we still used the wheel!", but the song scored heavy credibility points with its mention of Bob Dylan. Probably did ol' Bob no harm at all, either.

It's difficult to imagine a more eclectic and yet completely satisfying collection of songs. "5000 Spirits" really is more than the sum of its parts. Although "Hangman's" sold more copies and probably does represent the supreme artistic achievement of the band, this album is such an encapsulation of a special moment, a breathtaking upswing which could never possibly be recaptured. The Beatles had progressed steadily to "Sgt. Pepper", but the ISB's rise to familiar heights with only their second album was meteoric to say the least. I am just glad I was around when it happened.

Stuart also wrote the Wee Tam piece in issue 7- not Stuart Taylor - Ed.

And now, a younger reader - possibly also from Planet Gimbri. We know him as Mr Pooka..



Elektra publicity handout by Simon & Marijke

capable hands the delivery could have sounded hopelessly melodramatic and contrived. Robin's sombre tones and sparse guitar, however, produce a haunting and starkly beautiful, if disturbing, piece.

"Gently Tender" is something of a second cousin to "Chinese White" in its overall feel - nice guitar licks from Mike, and Robin comes over all multi-instrumental again. Joe Boyd obviously enjoyed bunging on some echo and generally playing around with the protracted end sequence with nonsense jabberings and false endings - if it all seems a little contrived now it certainly didn't then; great stuff. The closer is "Way Back In The 1960s", another slightly "clubby" track with hot guitar and bass from the Heron/Williamson/Thompson trio (what must the grizzled jazz/folk stalwart have made of these two impossibly gifted, elfin hippy characters?

The layers of the onion - the implications are profound. We are talking here about the human soul, and how it may be 'stripped' and 'peeled', but also how it may be made rotten, if only at the core. Also, the onion grows in rich, dark, damp soil, needs watering once a month or thereabouts, and may be covered from time to time with beastly grubs, earwigs and their despicable like. The ISB, to be sure, were no strangers to the more peculiar aspects of life on earth. Their music is full of oddity, unfathomable depths, unpleasant noise, unmentionable details and information about the unspoken side of life; it's fairly true to say it can do your head in. In this respect 5000 Spirits is not their most challenging LP. Why, compared to its follow up, Onion's a throwaway folk banana, a rock-as-you-like special. But it also more than just hints at the

themes of Godliness and even devilry that the band were later to take up, even to the extent of this being their **main thing**.

Let's go there!

When an album begins with a track like Chinese White one, on hearing it, feels a great relief. From the opening acoustic guitar pattern onwards one's heart is engulfed by normal thoughts, and the lines on one's brow soften. Also, one's buttocks fall easily into a more comfortable position on one's chair, due to blood flooding to parts of the body roused by emotional stimulus. And how many albums can you say that about? Most make the listener come over all stiff and uptight, wondering when it will end, and what they will put on next etc. Robin Williamson comes into his own on this track; the bowed gimbri is uncanny, and cheekily effective. He and Heron are blending well.

Pushing The Envelope

All of this yak about pilgrims and the mystics puts one in mind of death and dying. The song My Name Is Death raises a serious question. How real were the String Band? Did he really believe he was death, during their reading? It's possible to believe so. This was one of the earliest of the "impersonal" Williamson numbers, where he seems kind of detached and unreal, as if voicing the thoughts of nature. A similar approach can be witnessed on The Eyes Of Fate and The Mad Hatters Song. These numbers mark a definite break away from the folk tradition and, aside from instrumentation, reveal a middle eastern influence in their meandering vocal patterns. In fact, the archetypal ISB singing style, it could be said. Eyes Of Fate contains the extraordinary line, "Effort and contrariness

studio recording of Alice Is A Long Time Gone, a wonderful winding number on a similar theme. I think it was intended as a companion piece. These are musical fairytales to lead one down the garden path.

Now let's ease back in our high chairs, adjust our position a bit and relax. Let's go nice and lite. I want to talk now about some of the folksy, more conventional if you like, but definitely more upbeat and lively numbers on the album. We have Blues For The Muse, a great bit of heavy guitar folk which would sound good covered by Jimi Hendrix. Then there's Little Cloud which deals with the girl/boy situation at its most chaotic. "Here I am" says Little Cloud. People criticise the tune for being too "slap happy", but I am inclined to disagree. It is a love song and it hints at the gorgeous nature of that all too human sentiment. Men should



Lyrics seem of the "psychedelic pilgrims prayers" ilk if one wishes to be cynical. It seems to suggest LSD intoxication is what I'm saying.... "I can't keep my eyes on the book because it's mouldering." But maybe he means the book of his soul, as would be suggested by the use of the metaphor in other songs. Never mind. Anyway, Chinese White is what me and the boys in our cell block call a "roundie". That is it develops its musical themes in a decidedly circular fashion, then resolves it into a circle after each chorus. It's great.

change the direction of time." This is the philosophical folk balladist pushing the envelope. Like the title of the album suggests, these numbers seem multi-layered in that they involve a kind of interplay with the listener. The more one becomes involved with the song the more there seems to be to it. A frightening idea to be sure, and one that makes me mindful of this; keep to light pop, disco music and "take it or leave it" cheery beat hops!

The Mad Hatter's Song is a real eastern intrigue, full of joyous sitar, Danny Thompson on bass and Williamson's droning vocals. It is worth hearing the unreleased

My name is death - Steve Small

be strong! They should not worry about the "gold string that was dangling" and its dubious like. If they "float away to distant lands" it should be in life jackets of steel and they should not look back.

Not One For Putting On After A Family Suicide

No Sleep Blues is a fine number, real up-tempo. It has odd, playful lyrics that reminded me of oriental poetry (not that I actually ever read any). Delightful? Yes, if you feel that way already. Not one for putting

on after a family suicide! Likewise Painting Box. Good female vocals and fantastic "patchwork" guitar. A simple tune, quite commercial. It was a 45! In Painting Box our Mike sings "I kinda like the sea that I'm on and I don't mind if I do drown." Now what on earth was he going on about? He was being fatalistic, giving himself up to destiny - for the sake of kicks no doubt. The song, of course, has dark implications lurking beneath the happy-go-lucky breezings, as does the Hedgehog Song. Who the hell is the hedgehog? He always turns up at the last minute, such as at the wedding, throwing a spanner in the works, spoiling the party etc....

First Girl I Loved is an amazing love ballad, full of charm. It makes me coy to listen to it; I don't know why. The guitar is in an odd tuning, I know that much, and in the chorus it bursts into oud-like patterns or what in heavy metal circles is known as machine gunning.

More Folk You Philosophy

Also on the album are two Heron compositions which, while set into folk blues inspired styles actually reach out into the unknown world of the mind - which, as I have pointed out, is divided into layers. Will Gently Tender make your eyes water? And what layers could You Know What You Could Be peel? Or will they simply force you to slam your rolling pin down on your silly Mr Twirly with a cry of "No More!" Will you take your kitchen knife to your own heart? Gently Tender is a sweet lullaby in which Mike pines for his chick, "But leave me please, behind my brain, the slightest shadow of...her". Later he complains that all his wine is has turned to water! I think You Know What You Could Be is an expression of disdain at the idea of a sociologically created basis of self. It's more folk you philosophy for ya!

The long player is ending now. Click, whirr, let's go to the toilet. That last track was Way Back In The 1960s, really a chuckle-a-longa folk banana. Yeh, I dig it. It's supposedly written from the viewpoint of someone in the future, like nowadays for instance. It was also a cunning way of upsetting mentally fragile LSD trippers listening in the 70s!

A genuine need for expansion?

One aspect of the Incredible String Band that I want to dwell on is their godliness. They had moved, on 5000 Spirits, from being pure folk to being **pure folk** i.e. from playing trad. music to being real people who are frustrated characters, who have something to say. The bowed gimbri, the oud-like guitar runs and the wailing vocals all satisfied a sense of needing to break away from the stereotypical form of folk. And here, of course, lies the division in the minds of the listeners and critics. Did they simply move into another stereotypical form (i.e. hippy)? Or did they genuinely create something original? Were they prompted by a genuine need for expansion into other dimensions of music, or by an irritable boredom and desire

for novelty? Of course all real String Band fans would say they were simply bored. But they were at the forefront of the revolution and I think it's a serious misunderstanding to describe the Stringees as a hippy band. Albums like Changing Horses are not really anything you could put your stubby finger on, except in a pointless way. Also the music is timeless; they don't cut wax like that anymore and more's the shame. I prefer not to say "good, better, best" when talking about sounds, for an album is good in that it can be seen in very diverse ways, including undecipherable or slightly offensive ones. But, even so, I'd have to say that 5,000 Spirits is not as "good" as The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter. It just isn't as good.

Phew. The last thing I will say is that I like 5000 Spirits. It vibrates, it rattles on the turntable, and it is a one-off disc, a mind blower.

There, I'm going off to bake some bread.

Grabame Hood can still find something new in "First Girl I Loved"

One night in 1972 I came home from school to find a copy of 5000 Spirits on the kitchen table.

"Paul gave me that" my mother explained, "he thought you might like to borrow it". That, my friends, was my introduction to the wonderful world of the ISB, and the germ of the reason why I am sitting at a table 400 miles and 24 years away typing this now. Paul lived a couple of doors away from us. I suppose he was about thirty then and had reasonably long hair and the then obligatory beard and jacket with leather elbow patches. He drove a tastefully tatty VW Beetle and seemed to spend most evenings in the smoky depths of The Black Bull. My father rather disapproved of him.

I had heard of the String Band of course. I knew enough to know that the photo on the back cover was the wrong way round and that Robin was no longer bearded. I suppose I must have read about them in the MM or Sounds, and I distinctly remember a photo of Mike with his hair tied back (what a trend-setter he was) leaning intently over a Stratocaster, which confused me as the ISB were a folk band weren't they? And who was the girl with the Hofner violin bass? Then there was the advert, which I appear to have been the only person in the world to see, of Ms McKechnie walking over a lawn with the caption "Why is Likky so Happy?". No it was not an advert for Sun Kool Cola*, but for those people in East Grinstead. It was in Sounds. Honest. (*author's note: Sun Kool Cola - for kool cats - was a Coca-Cola tastealike made by the famous mineral water

company, Pearces of Innerleithen. Despite having a famous pop group living a mere mile or so away, the advertising opportunity was never taken. Shame.)

My musical tastes then? I had inherited a stack of classic Motown singles from my elder sister, and Rod Stewart was beyond criticism in those days. Deep Purple's Fireball was a local fave and the more sophisticated raved about Yes. Bowie was on the up and we were all shocked by his appearance on TOTP when he put his arm round Mick Ronson during Starman. So he was a poof!(sic) Among the few older longhairs I knew the ISB commanded some respect mainly because they weren't "commercial", the ultimate crime. I snigger to recall being told by a nineteen year old that Hawkwind (who had a hot single with Silver Machine) were "just a commercial Pink Floyd!"

Needle to vinyl time. First Girl stuck out immediately. I liked Hedgehog, No Sleep Blues, Painting Box and Way Back In The 1960s. Didn't like Little Cloud. The rest didn't seem to make much impression at the time, though the idea of a Magic Christmas Tree was irritating.

Musically First Girl is very attractive; the thin buzzy sounding guitar against the firm anchor of Danny Thompson's bowed double bass. The last *beGLAD* revealed that Robin sometimes fitted a flat brass bridge to his guitar to give a sitar-y tinge to the sound, and you can clearly hear it in use here. Though I have had the songbook for years and often played First Girl, I had always played it in DGDGBD tuning. Indeed the ISB songbook was my introduction to playing in altered tunings, though it took me a good few years to appreciate the advantages of them. Until I had a long term loan of a banjo (which is basically the same tuning) and started to play slide guitar (on a briefly owned Dobro - no, I don't want to talk about it - sob) I was firmly convinced that open tuning was an affectation pure and simple. While writing this, I finally followed the instructions in the songbook and tuned the guitar to CFCFAC and played along with the record. The effects of tuning down are to give the guitar a more delicate tone, as well as making the strings much more easy to bend. In fact on the record you would almost think Robin was playing a twelve string guitar, it is so sweet. And, I had never noticed this before, even though the song itself is not paced quickly, the guitar part certainly is.

But initially the lyrics were the main attraction. Even at that tender age I knew that song lyrics were not to be taken literally. Mike Heron didn't really have a familiar hedgehog who vetoed all his girlfriends. It was a Pine Marten. Despite all this I never doubted for a minute that First Girl was about a real person, and I was surprised at the frankness of the lyrics. Who was she? No one ever appears to have asked Robin, but we can surmise he knew her when he was at school and they drifted apart as he became devoted to music. I believe the song was written either in Morocco where Robin spent the autumn of 66/67 between the first two

albums, or shortly after his return. Perhaps he met his old girlfriend again, or maybe just saw her from a distance, as he has no firm information. He assumes she's married, house and car and all. Does he disapprove of this? Has she changed from the girl she was when he knew her? "Last time I seen (wince) you, you said you'd joined the church of Jesus". Normality city.

"But me, I remember your long red hair, falling in our faces as I kissed you". That was the line that did it for me. (Red haired girls are not uncommon in Scotland. I will say no more). The second verse irked me as well as pleased, the pronunciation of "guitar" for one thing! Why didn't he like to see the

And finally, "I have a sweet woman, maybe someday to have babies by me, she's pretty, is a true friend of mine". On the surface, touching, but the choice of words is interesting, there's nothing about love there; the use of "true friend"; was the subject of the song not a true friend? Was that why they parted? Anyway, that's how it was for me, and the fact I can still find something new in the song after so many listenings only goes to show what a remarkable bunch the Incredibles were. But I expect you know that. Thank you, Mr Bassett.

me a copy of Hangman's. I admit that at the time I found it all a little too strange (I was heavily into the Velvet Underground, the Byrds, Love and 60's garage/psych in general), and just gave it a casual listen. However, odd mentions of the band in music papers and magazines ensured they were not forgotten, then, one day, on finding myself in the HMV shop in Southampton, flicking through the sale CDs, I was confronted with the garish, psychedelic cover that is *The 5000 Spirits...* The lysergic-influenced cover design and promise of weird and exotic instruments did it for me, so I soon decided to take the risk and hand over the extremely reasonable sum of £6.99 for a copy.



people he made love to (literally or with his music)? Was it "six at morning" or "sick sad morning" [The latter - Ed.] What did "if I were lying near you now I wouldn't be here at all" and "I'd just have to fall", mean? "Well I never slept with you, though we must have made love a thousand times". Pardon? Yes, that was a puzzler that one. Eventually I decided that if "made love" = sexual intercourse and "slept with" = spent whole night with, the line did make sense. After all they were just young and had no place to go, and I found out just what that meant before too long. The wide hills and beside long waters would have been one place for the lovers to be alone. But time had moved on and she can go there and not think of Robin, as she had taken other lovers there since. And, Robin, old chap, a *thousand times*.....?

Climbing up these figures...by Steve Small

The First Incredible String Band Album I Loved - Shane Pope

My first introduction to the String Band came about six years ago, when someone lent

On returning home, the disc was quickly placed into the CD player, from whence the room was filled with the haunting sound of Robin's bowed gimbri. But what to make of it? It was certainly good, not like anything I had heard before. The songs covered a wide range, from the deeply spiritual to the humorous, from complex layers of sound to the beautifully simple, and from the out-there psychedelic to traditional-sounding folk tunes. The playing was adventurous and full of an innocent enthusiasm, though never pretentious, contrived or perfect like much of the 'Progressive Rock' that was to follow in the coming years. This was how I'd always believed music should be made, the 'feel' of a song being more important than absolute musical perfection. And then there was those voices...

Well, from that day on I was hooked, and The 5000 Spirits... was soon joined in my collection by the CD reissues of Hangman's (much more enjoyable second time around!), Wee Tam/The Big Huge, etc., etc. After purchasing the Be Glad... video reissue a couple of years back, I was pleased to discover, via the pages of this fine tome, that I wasn't the only one who listened to this kind of thing - much thanks to Andy and everyone else involved!

Anyway, that was my introduction to all things 'String', but what about the LP? In time honoured fashion, here's the inevitable run through of the tracks.

The album opens with Mike's Chinese White, the aforementioned gimbrì signalling the changes that had taken place within the band since the more folksy atmosphere of the eponymous debut LP. Clive had disappeared to follow the emerging hippie trail through Afghanistan and India, leaving the core of Robin, having returned from Morocco clutching an array of strange instruments, and Mike, fresh from honing his skills around the country's folk clubs. It's a fine opening track, full of mystical imagery, though to the suspicious the title could be construed as a hidden reference to illicit substances (see the Velvet Underground's White Light/White Heat, Johnny Thunders Chinese Rocks, Tomorrow's My White Bicycle or Jefferson Airplane/The Great Society's White Rabbit). As a note to train spotters, doesn't the lyric 'I will lay me down with my arms around a rainbow...' sound familiar? Yes, that's right, Mike had previously used a very similar line in Maybe Someday, the opening track to the first album!

Next up is Robin's No Sleep Blues, one of my favourite tracks on the album, a humorous tale of the strange things that you end up thinking about when you can't sleep at night. (*I think this is the drugs song - not Chinese White!* Ed) After hearing this, many a String Band fan must have lain awake all night thinking of football-playing mice and the mixing of stones and water!

Painting Box marks the first appearance on record of Likky, and was released as a single (backed with No Sleep Blues), though I've no idea whether anyone actually bought it - I certainly haven't seen a copy. It's a shame really, as it's a great poppy-psych track, filled with the colourful imagery of the time, and would have made a fine 'Summer of Love' hit. The song is probably the nearest the band came to writing a 'pop' song - witness the 'Julie Felix Show' performance.

The Mad Hatter's Song provides a complete contrast, and a glimpse at what was to come on following albums. A strong Williamson composition of the kind we all know and love, the title suggests a Lewis Carroll influence (a common psychedelic reference point at the time, following Jefferson Airplane's ever-popular White Rabbit), although the lyrics are none so obvious. Confusion in the song credits always made me believe the 'Soma sitar' was a type of sitar, played by Robin, but Mike's interview in issue 3 of *beGLAD* confirmed the player as his sitar teacher, Soma!

Again providing a contrast to the previous track, Little Cloud is an amusing nonsense song about a friendly cloud - Mike seemed to specialise in these kinds of things at the time. The intro 'How sweet to be a cloud, floating in the blue' is taken directly from the first chapter of A.A. Milne's classic 'Winnie-The-Pooh', where Pooh attempts to disguise himself as a cloud, using a balloon, in order to get the honey from a bee's nest in a tree. This is not the last time that this influence would surface in a String Band song - see The Mountain Of God on The Big Huge. As an aside, the New York-based weird electronic psych-band The United States Of America recorded a full version of Pooh's original Cloud Song on their self-titled LP from 1968.

The Eyes Of Fate follows that, and gives another pointer to the direction the band were to pursue on future albums. The lyrics are of the deep spiritual kind that Robin took to greater heights on songs like Creation, Job's Tears and Maya, and the song has a distinct Eastern flavour despite the lack of any 'ethnic' instrumentation, due in no small part to the use of chanting throughout.

The majority of the LP features alternate Williamson and Heron songs, but with Blues For The Muse Robin gets two in a row. The lyrics seem at first glance to suggest that the song is an ode to Robin's guitar (the famous hand-painted one seen on the 'Julie Felix Show'?) or at least to playing the guitar ('I like to be born into my guitar days') - very strange. To crown it all off, Mike 'Sonny Boy' Heron adds an enthusiastic wailing harp - great stuff!

The Hedgehog's Song is next up, and continues in a similar vein to Little Cloud. 'Funny little (singing) hedgehogs' indeed - we can only assume Mike was smoking something other than tobacco when he wrote this! Still it's an enjoyable romp, indicative of the times, and always guaranteed to raise a smile if nothing else.

But then there's First Girl I Loved - a strong contender for my favourite song of all time, and the one that truly hooked me to the band (if anyone has a copy of the first song book that they don't need, or can supply me with a photocopy of First Girl... then I'd be eternally grateful!). Showing that simplicity is always best, it features just Robin on guitar and vocals, with sympathetic bowed-bass added by Danny Thompson. Surely one of the most beautifully erotic songs ever written, full of poetic imagery like 'I never slept with you, but we must have made love a thousand times' and 'I remember your long red hair, falling in our faces as I kissed you', it tells of a young (lost) love among the wild countryside of Scotland. If it fails to move you, then what will ???

Nothing could really follow First Girl... but Mike's You Know What You Could Be is still a fine song. It warns of the dangers of worrying too much of other people's opinion of yourself, rather than getting on with your own life and so discovering 'what you really could be'. Robin adds the marvellously named oud (its first appearance on a string band LP), hand drums and an atmospheric

flute solo at the end!

Robin's My Name Is Death explores a similar vein to the traditional song Death and the Lady. A reoccurring theme in many folk songs and stories, it tells of a person's meeting with the Grim Reaper and their attempt to buy further time with jewels and worldly possessions, but all to no avail, as everyone, however rich or powerful, must someday 'bow to him'. The Kaleidoscope, a Los Angeles-based psychedelic band of the time, recorded a similar song, Oh Death, on their debut LP Side Trips. They employed many a Middle-Eastern instrument, sort of a cross between West-Coast bands like the 'Airplane and the 'Dead and the ISB, and are well worth checking out if that's your cup of Tea (H.C.)!

Mike's final contribution to the LP is Gently Tender, probably my favourite Heron track on the album. It's another song of lost love (probably), with Mike's tears (the rain) 'washing clean the slate again' and his feeling that it's all for the best ('but I love the stones beneath my feet as much'), ending with the realisation that it's all over ('but now all my wine is water'). Robin is credited as playing bass gimbrì, which we can guess, from Raymond Greenoaken's ISB Instrument Dictionary, may be his usual bowed gimbrì with the strings tuned lower.

The album ends with 'Nostradamus' Williamson's Way Back In The 1960s, an amusing apocalyptic tale of life in the future, with Robin looking back to when he was young, giving rise to that immortal line 'That was way back in the 1960s - yes you made your own amusement then...'. It's yet another fine track (aren't they all?) and, again, one of my overall favourites. The lines about Bob Dylan are particularly pertinent, considering the very money-oriented way the music 'business' has gone since those times.

So there we have it, a fine LP with not even a single duff track. It's certainly a most enjoyable album, as you probably already know - but if not, go out and buy a copy now - you won't be disappointed!

THE CRYSTAL DREAMS UNFOLDING - Mike Swann looks at how history has been rewritten

History is a strange phenomenon: on the face of it one would have thought it all to be straightforward. But really, hindsight and retrospective viewing are even more important factors in assessing the importance of historical events than the dry details that

go straight into the record books.

With regard to 5000 Spirits, history has changed perspective several times. For starters, the whole late 60's period and the impact of its popular music is now realised to be much more important than it appeared to be at the time. 'Pop' music was a comparatively new phenomenon then, viewed by almost every traditional authority (and almost everyone over the age of 30!) as being an ephemeral product of at best, little lasting value, and, at worst, very dubious, even dangerous! content.

What is now certain is that when the people of the next few centuries look at the late 20th century it will be the 'serious' contemporary popular music that will be considered the 'Classical' music of the time, much more than 'modern classical' composers such as Stockhausen or Cage, who will be viewed as erratics who simply took the forms of the past up various blind alleys.

The musical history of our time when looked at from the future will surely show the late 20th century as being defined by Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Hendrix et al, and most certainly the music of the Incredible String Band. Here in the 1990's the importance of the I.S.B. in influencing so much of the music of the time is being increasingly recognised. For instance a very recent book "Revolution in the Head: The Beatles' Records and the Sixties" by Iain McDonald (Pimlico 1995), a very much-acclaimed and successful volume, at least 4 or 5 times pays lengthy tribute to the ISB's late 60's contribution and its effects; other publications paint a similar picture and, what is apparent is that chart/commercial success does not necessarily play a leading role in assessing the importance of particular music in historical perspective - where in the charts did Morrison's Astral Weeks; Love's Forever Changes; Velvet Underground and Nico finish up (to name three now generally recognised indisputable cornerstones of late 20th century music)? The answer - either very, very low or nowhere at all!

Commerciality and quality are two entirely separate axes which do occasionally, but not necessarily, coincide, and the factors that decide 'commerciality' vary considerably with time in any case, and are often as difficult to grasp as straws in the wind. So it is with the music of the Incredible String Band: seen universally as almost wilfully uncommercial, it is music with few easy 'entry points' and never as being

accessible to a huge audience - yet, increasingly, their early classics - the second to fourth/fifth albums - are recognised as essential pillars of the era. Oddly, the album that is unquestionably their most accessible, No Ruinous Feud, never reached the charts, and is viewed as a masterpiece by absolutely no-one! Of the early Elektra gems though, the objective record books say that just one, Hangman's Beautiful Daughter, was a relatively big commercial item; increasingly though, the general consensus is that it is one of their most 'idiosyncratic' LPs.

This is where 'history' has changed: both the record charts of the time, and the early assessments of their career said categorically that the contribution of the Incredible string Band was defined almost entirely by Hangman's Beautiful Daughter, with just a few brief moments of inspiration either side of it.

The generally-held opinion now among commentators seems to be that, at the very least, 5000 Spirits and Wee Tam and the Big

33 acts in the entire 828-page volume exceed this!), two of these being doubles: Wee Tam and the Seasons they Change retrospective (the latter 'in lieu' of Liquid Acrobat possibly? - he names Darling Belle as one of his 'All-Time Top 100 favourite tracks!') - both these doubles are rated more highly by Strong than the other two, Spirits and Hangman's (which are graded equal to each other). These are but two examples of an increasing trend: history now 'says' that the ISB's second to fifth albums are of, more or less, equal stature.

This is where it all began for me..

5000 Spirits was the first ISB album I owned - it is my favourite because of that alone - this is where it all began for me, even if I feel, as others do, that Wee Tam is the better album, Spirits occupies that special place in my affections, which will never change - even if 'history' does!

So, let us 'celebrate' the work which saw

'the crystal dreams unfolding', the work which introduced most of us, I suspect, to the magical universe of the Incredible String Band:

After returning from their first trip to the USA, Robin and Mike went into Sound Techniques studio. The sessions were distinctly longer than the 'one weekend' that they spent on the debut LP, as the two lads had developed some considerable sophistication in that short intervening period. The record was released in August 1967, and immediately it was obvious that these progressions were going to lift Robin and Mike well beyond the restricted 'folk' circle that had embraced their debut effort. Even before the album's release a Melody Maker article of 24th June '67 claimed that their songwriting was already equal to that of the Beatles' on Sgt. Pepper and after the album's issue, reviews were unanimous in their lavish

praise. The Guardian also compared the album to Sgt. Pepper:

"...if this extraordinary and exciting record can be compared to anything, it is to the Beatles' Sgt. Pepper LP. It deserves to have just as much effect on the music scene, and should be just as difficult to imitate..."

The 'Observer' was even more impressed: "...The ISB are currently writing the most beautiful songs and making the most inventive sounds on any scene, bar none..."



Allan Frewin's Hatter

Huge equal Hangman's ... in stature, if not surpass it:

Colin Larkin's "All -Time Top 1000 Albums" Guinness Book of 1994 has ..Spirits as no. 40 in the Top 50 Folk Albums (Hangman.. is not in the list); and Martin Strong in "The Great Rock Discography" (Canongate, 1995 - which features the 1000 most important all-time rock artists) gives huge coverage to the ISB. Many acts have only one "recommended" album, often a compilation - the Incredibles have four (only

Music press, too, gave the album superb accolades; Karl Dallas in M.M. gave the lengthiest review, also dragging in the "...Pepper" comparison.

Barely a year had separated this work from those first tentative steps on the debut work. There were so many revolutionary innovations and exploratory qualities here that it really was barely believable, so the "Incredible" tag on their name was now more than justified.

Chinese White opens the set, and is a slow, delicate piece with main features; strong lead vocals from the writer of the song, Mike; and the Moroccan one-string fiddle, the gimbri, from Robin which adds much atmosphere to the song. Some memorable lyrics;

"...the bent twig of darkness grows the petals of the morning...limbing up these figures the sun is tugging at my shoulders..."

The third line of the chorus features acapella harmony from the twosome - stunningly beautiful, conjuring up an atmosphere of ancient Scots lore before the gimbri brings in the touch of North Africa again. Voice/guitar/gimbri are really in such perfect balance, producing a genuinely arresting track. "The crystal dreams unfolding" is the phrase I have used to title this article, as I feel it so perfectly sums up the feeling that this work brings, in establishing the vision of the Incredible String Band.

No Sleep Blues is next up. It is not a 12-bar, but is done in a light rock/blues vein. A pleasant, humorous Williamson song which I love of course, but it is not one of my favourites here, which should indicate how highly I regard this set! The track features Robin's characteristically quirky vocals and an open-tuned (G) lead acoustic from Mike sounding in parts like a sitar. Robin's lovely airy flute is heard for the first time and the excellent Danny Thompson of Pentangle fame is on double bass.

Track three is Painting Box, a tasteful, gentle almost caressing song from Mike Heron, with a lovely melody and some superb lyrics: simple, fresh images to please the ear and the mind's eye;

"...my Friday evening's footsteps plodding dully through this black town/are far away now from the world that I'm in/myeyes are listening to some sounds that I think just might be Springtime/with daffodils between my toes/I'm laughing at the wind..."

On the romantic, catchy chorus, Robin and Likky sing harmony with Mike. Likky's angelic tones are a joy to hear. Robin's flute and lead acoustic, Danny Thompson's bass, and Likky's finger cymbal claps give a fair spine-tingling texture to the track. It was released as a single in March '68 (with No Sleep.. on the B-side) due to the popularity of the song on the boys' rare TV appearance on "Once More With Felix"; Julie sang along with them on the show itself, and released a cover version.

The next track, Robin's Mad Hatter's Song is a revolutionary, stunning piece that highlighted how the ISB went some way to

changing the course of pop music with this album. The main innovations here were: (a) Length - over 6 minutes long but not in repetitive style like Dylan's songs. (b) It featured REAL Indian music (unlike the Beatles' previous tentative sitarised efforts) with both guest Soma's superb sitar playing and Robin's incantatory vocals. (c) Tempos - a remarkable number of time-signature changes in the song, some 7 or 8 in all as the song moves through many moods. (d) Consequent juxtapositions of musical styles and cultural modes - begins in Indian style, and moves through a gentle countryish lilt to a 12-bar blues and back again! (e) Robin's vocals - as expressive and varied as the song, piercing and arresting in the Indian section, earthy and western on the blues, warm and appealing in the gentler passages. (f) Lyrics.

MIKE HARDING INTRODUCING ISB'S HEDGEHOG SONG ON RADIO 2 (back in 1986)

"In the late sixties I was playing in a jug band called the Edison Bell Spasm Band and wherever we played we always did the Hedgehog Song by The Incredible String Band. The Incredible String Band were composed of Mike Heron, Robin Williamson and Clive Palmer who were young lads from Edinburgh and during the psychedelic flower power movement which spawned Donovan, the yellow mellow chap, the Incredible String Band were prolific songwriters playing a great array of instruments. The only thing I've got against them was that after they appeared on the scene everybody went around wearing bells and kaftans and carrying incense and saying things like "peace", "far out man" and "is this where tha gets the bus for Marrakesh tha' knows". But worst of all, after they appeared on the scene, everybody wore Afghan coats that smelt of yak pee when it rained. And working in folk clubs on wet nights in the sixties was purgatory for anybody with a sensitive stomach. But they did have more of a musical influence on the folk scene than anyone else at that time. So here's the Incredible String Band with The Hedgehog Song.

Thanks to Grahame Hood.

Reflecting the depth of innovation in the music, there is a profound and exploratory quality in the lyrics and subject matter:

"...Prometheus the problem child still juggling with his brains/gives his limping leopard's visions to the miser in his veins/within the ruined factory the normal soul insane/as he sets the sky beneath his heels and learns away the pain..."

No-one had ever mixed tempos, styles, cultures, instruments and emotional landscapes like this before. What Dylan and the Beatles had begun, the Incredibles took so many stages further, mixing every conceivable form, instrument and tradition into a cohesive and flowing kaleidoscope of musical colour and feeling. This was not a 'pretty' song like Painting Box, but it is disturbingly compelling, and astoundingly

original. Even today, 30 years on, it has the power to take your breath away and stop you in your tracks, almost commanding you to listen.

Track five, Mike's Little Cloud brings some necessary light relief! This is a quirky, childlike, anthropomorphic song. It has a pretty tune that fair dances along to Robin's urgent hand drum accompaniment. Cute (but not shallow) imagery here far removed from the urban decay and Eastern mysticism of Mad Hatter - the distinctive harmonies on the chorus of Robin's almost feminine tones float above Mike's earthy delivery giving the perfect impression of the "little chick cloud" singing along. A seemingly simple piece of music, the guitar-playing however has some very intricate phrases, and there are some tricky time-signature changes.

The sixth track is Robin's Eyes of Fate, an incredibly beautiful track despite the doom-laden, pessimistic feel. At the start, vibrato strumming on the guitar from Robin sets the mood, his piercingly cold yet rich, clear vocal leading you into a desolate landscape;

"...Oh who can see in the eyes of fate/all life alone in its chronic patterns/oh swan let me fly you to the land of no winds blowing/I know nothing, and know that I know nothing/all is in the eye and in its blinks of seeing..."

Mike's harmony on the chorus in a deep, growling voice adds to the sinister tone of the song - Likky, barely audible, being the one chink of light in a gloomy scene. It is extraordinarily effective though, an outstanding lyric and an excellent melody, despite the dirge-like feel.

Side Two

Side Two begins with Robin's Blues for the Muse, a straight 4/4 blues in A major, 12-bar in form but without the repeated lyrical AAB(A) phrases of normal 12-bar songs. Robin's strong vocal delivery and Mike's energetic harmonica give the track a forceful, down-to-earth feel far removed from the feyness some reviewers accused them of. It is its simplicity that gives this track its strength. There are some splendid lines on a song about Robin's guitar and its role in his music.

The next cut is Mike's exquisite Hedgehog's Song. This is similar to Little Cloud but much deeper. A memorable tune, catchy chorus and a splendidly humorous lyric which, although in the form of a children's song, hides a characteristic wisdom seldom equalled in the popular music of the time;

"...you know all the words and you sung all the notes/you never quite learned the song..."

Excellent harmonies from the lads, Robin's hand drums behind Mike's beautifully scratchy lead guitar give a lovely 'open' sound, the guitar being open-tuned to F.

Following on, we have Robin's First Girl I Loved, an all time favourite of mine, one of the most poignant, personal and honest works that I know of. It is one of the most widely-recorded of ISB songs. Jackson Browne

included this track as one of his "My Top 10" in his Radio One appearance on Andy Peebles' show in 1986.

On Robin's own version his acoustic guitarwork is nothing short of astounding, his only accompaniment being Danny Thompson's masterful double bass. The complex tuning and chords, and incredible speed are something few guitarists could emulate, and yet still make this secondary to the emotional quality of the music. Robin sings with an alternate driving strength, then understatement, bringing out the aching sadness in the lyric. The song has a beautiful melody, especially on the eminently singable chorus. The title speaks for itself: anyone who was ever in love for a first time can completely identify with this song, which is its great strength, being such a summation of those wonderful, yet agonising feelings of first love;

"...well I want you to know I just had to go/want you to know we just had to grow/and you're probably married now, kids and all/and you turned into a grown up female stranger/and if I was lying near you now, I'd just have to fall..."

A classic track in every respect. Mike's You Know What You Could Be has the appearance of being one of the album's simpler tracks, but gave increasing evidence of Mike's songwriting abilities, and Robin's phenomenal instrumental talents - and of the way they blended western and eastern styles almost imperceptibly together in one song. A gentle, poetic lyric and an excellent tune once again:

"...listen to the song of life, its rainbow's ends won't hold you/its crimson shapes and purple sounds softly will enfold you/it gurgles through the timeless glades, in quarter-tones of lightning/no policy is up for sale, in case the truth be frightening..."

There is a simple piece of philosophical wisdom on the chorus;

"...you know what you could be, tell me my friend/why you worry all the time what you should be"

It is an outstanding track instrumentally, Robin playing oud, mandolin, flute and hand drums. The interplay with Mike's guitar is marvellous, and the whole track has a really rich, warm feeling.

The next track, My Name is Death, in contrast is cold and chilling, another masterpiece of desolation and pessimism. The first verse, consisting of 4 lines and 36 words, is all on the same note, middle C, and in a 'strung out' 12/8 time signature, and this really heightens the mood. The chorus though is beautifully melodic but still has the modal touch;

"...my name is death cannot you see/all life must turn to me"

The second verse has the chorus tune and the whole piece is so effective, just Robin's crystal clear voice and 'spare' guitar strumming setting the menacingly chill atmosphere. Yet another standout.

The set's penultimate track is Mike's Gently Tender, which displays all the outstanding features of his other songs on the LP; catchy, hummable tune; earthy, romantic,

poetic lyrics;

"...gently tender snowdrop grows/see the past tense quietly go..."

Excellent accompaniment from Robin where his delicately dancing drums and 'float away' flute augment the outdoor rural feel - but there are extras here too, particularly the energetic vocal combinations from Mike, Robin and Likky, ending up in a lovely, crazy, jumbled 'mess' of singing and chattering as the music stops and then edges back from this 'anarchy' with one chord before the melody returns. All credit here to Joe Boyd for the production, and allowing Robin and Mike's creative skills such free rein.

So to the closer, Way Back in the 1960's (Robin). Coming after all that lot it certainly did seem far less revolutionary than that first time I heard it on the radio but, well, it is a quite brilliant, original track all the same. It starts with straight guitar strumming from Robin leading into a splendid riff of lead acoustic by Mike, then Robin's quirky vocal enters delivering these bitingly satirical and imaginative lines, which are fascinating to listen to now, in the 90's, to see if they have 'come true' (some have, some haven't!);

"...I was a young man back in the 1960's/yes you made your own amusements then/going to the pictures/well the travel was hard and I mean we still used the wheel/but you could sit down at your table/and eat a real food meal..."

Still, by the time Robin reaches his "91st Birthday", maybe England will "go missing" and we'll all "move to Paraguayee"! You made your first million yet, Robin?

This is simply an exceptionally beautiful and moving album, which had been my favourite for nigh on 30 years now. I can categorically say it changed me as a person for the better, helped me to come to terms with the world around me, made me aware of so much of the beauty and wonder that exists in it, and, not least, created a bond between myself and others, who, whether into this album or not, were affected by the consciousness of a whole generation that this album, possibly more than any other, helped to bring about.

A further remarkable facet of their success and appeal, was that they firmly set the seal on the human/emotional approach to music and writing. They were of course technically brilliant musicians, but the accent was always on the feel of the music, and the whole aura of the album is one of a fresh, natural outgrowth of untutored talent. It gives the impression that all the ideas and playing came from purely within themselves, rather than having been crafted from formal musical training, or any kind of restricted attitude to performing. The exuberant, almost childlike, innocent characteristics add to the freshness and constant surprise at the very wonder of life itself that comes across so strongly in all their early music, but especially here on 5000 Spirits.

Review

CALENDARIUM

Robin Williamson Ltd. ed. CD £14.99

Hot on the heels of the masterful *Island Of The Strong Door*, this CD captures Robin live and smokin' in Germany last October. The concert was staged to mark the opening of Hans Deibschlag's exhibition of his *Calendarium* sequence of paintings (see the back cover for details). Robin's brief was to match a song to each of the paintings, and thus to each month of the year. In some instances the connection is plain enough—*Month Of January*, *Cold Days Of February*, *Lammis*, *October Song*; in others, it's admittedly more tenuous—*Billy And The Scrapper* for *March*, or *Lights Of Sweet St Anne's* for *December*; and he pitches in *Love Letter To My Wife Bina* as an extra-calendrical encore.

It's a loosely knit but well-balanced set, with some outstanding performances. *Good As Gone*, unheard these past 30 years, is a dewdrop of glistening melancholy. *Maya*, though ruthlessly pruned to just four verses, throbs with antique power. *Billy And The Scrapper* forswears the laconic understatement of the *Island* version for an in-yer-face vividness, with some wickedly effective guitar lines. And *Banks Of Sweet Italy*, another inspired choice, is just exquisite.

There's not a weak performance here, though the unconverted might find Robin's languid and highly idiosyncratic rendering of *Month Of January* somewhat demanding. Between-songs banter is kept to a minimum: the focus is fully on the songs throughout. Anyone who's enjoyed the great man in concert in recently will cherish this recording. See page 5 for orders.

Raymond Greenoaken

Robin's 1997 dates

STOP PRESS !!

- 20.1.97 Celtic Connection Fest. Glasgow
- 21.1.97. Black Horse, Nettleham, Lincoln
- 5.2.97. Star Theatre, Sevenoaks
- 13.2.97. Spitz, East London
- 14.2.97. The Pit, Farnham
- 15.2.97. Spilsby Theatre, Lincolnshire
- 24.2.97. Village club, Nettlebed, Oxon
- 28.2.97. Assembly Rooms, Glastonbury
- 6.3.97. Chesterfield Arts Centre
- 26.3.97. Anvil, Basingstoke
- 17.5.97. Fairfield Arts Cen., Basingstoke

Old Haunts—New Horizons

an interview with Robin Williamson

In part 2 of his conversation with the Bard, Colin Thomas checks out Robin's address book

Legend has it that the *Wee Tam* photos were taken in Frank Zappa's garden. How did that come about?

It came about because—well, there was nowhere else to go! He wasn't there at the time, and the photographer knew him and said we could go in there. He was on tour at the time.

Did you meet him then?

No, I didn't actually meet Zappa.

Did you know any of the Beatles at all?

I bumped into Paul McCartney on several occasions and went to his wedding party in London, but I wouldn't say that I knew any of them. Me and Mike got offered a recording contract by Mick Jagger, which didn't actually transpire, but we did meet all of the Stones. And both the Beatles and the Stones used to come to gigs sometimes, as did members of Led Zeppelin—Robert Plant and Jimmy Page, both of whom have been very kind in print. And the other person I met then was Yoko Ono, before she was with Lennon. I went to have afternoon tea with her in London. She had the most extraordinary flat—full of art objects, including paintings the size of postage stamps on the tops of stepladders, things on the ceiling, and piles of nails with magnets that you pulled up and they would hold their position... and plates of glass hung all over the room on threads so you'd keep bumping into them.

Did you know Tim Buckley? He always spoke well of the ISB.

We did a tour with Tim Buckley and a nice bloke he was—don't know much about him.

You didn't play on stage with him?

No, I think he was opening for us, or we were opening for him, I can't remember which—I think he was opening for us.

Is it true you met the Dalai Lama?

No, I didn't meet the Dalai Lama, but I did meet two Tibetan monks, both of whom I got to know quite well—it's interesting the way stories change, isn't it? One of them was called Trimpah Rinpoche and the other one was called Akong, and Trimpah Rinpoche eventually ended up in the States, where I think he died. But the other one's still around. I think he runs a Tibetan Buddhist monastery not far from Eskdalemuir—Samye-Ling, it's called. Licorice and myself were at that time staying with Mary Stewart outside Glasgow, and a lot of people used to pass through that cottage, including the climbing crowd, because Mary was a climber—she was the first woman to climb the north face of the Eiger. So Tom Pateley and Chris Bonnington and other famous climbers used to come and stay there; and after that she became interested in Buddhism, so the two lamas used to come and stay there too.

Chris Bonnington liked the String Band a lot, apparently.

Yes, I met him a few times. He was a wonderful man, of course—I mean, what incredible achievements.

Have you been back to the Glen recently?

I haven't been back for a while—a couple of years—but, yes, I sometimes play the Traquair Fair. They have a little country fair in Traquair House, which is just beside the Glen.

Did you ever play on Mustique Island?

No, I've never been out here. That's where the owner of the Glen estate, Colin Tennant, lives part of the year. But I never went there, and no-one else that I knew ever went there.

So what brought you finally to Cardiff?

I came here with Geoff Moore to work on various Mabinogi

productions—in Caernarvon and Cardiff, there were three of them altogether plus various bits of theatre—and I ended up staying. I like Cardiff because it's such a multicultural town—and what with my wife being Indian—and it seems to be a nice unassuming sort of place. It's very easy to tour from, up and down the blooming M4. I've been touring a lot—I did about 200 concerts last year, just under, so I was on the road a lot—and I'm based here full-time now.

Do you drive?

I don't drive, though Bina does. When I go out on tour I go with a driver. Of course, you used to be able to get to most places on the train, but you can't any more. At one point I owned two cars and I couldn't drive either of them!

You've never been tempted to learn?

I don't know... It's just one of those things. One of my friends at school had a car—he became a policeman, I remember—but most of the time we just walked or took public transport. And then there was a big chunk of my life when most of my travelling was done in aeroplanes. After that, I did make a couple of attempts to learn to drive—pretty half-hearted. My eyesight is not frightfully great, anyway.

Any work in progress?

Well, I've been working on a book with Bob Stewart, who's also from Edinburgh, and who's done a lot of work on Celtic mythology and the Geoffrey of Monmouth Merlin material. (*It's out now—Ed*) Other than that, there's about twenty—at least—recording projects ready to go, including more material for children, instrumental material of various different kinds—it's all ready to go, it's just finding the time..

Interviewed in Cardiff 21 9 994. Photo by Jim Hill



Be Glad welcomes John Quigley, a man of no fixed abode but a mine of critical insights...

It'd be wrong to assume that, just because the ISB were, at least in part, a product of the traditional music revival and the folk clubs, they were universally popular in that world.

In the 60s, the folk scene was sharply divided between the traditionalists and the "folkniks" - the Increds belonging, of course, in the latter category. Indeed, some traddies were quite scathing about the ISB; Ian Campbell, for example, said some very rude things about them in a Melody Maker interview, while I once heard a story about them being booed off by an Edinburgh audience who'd come to hear The Corries! However, one connection between the tradition and the String Band was their relationship with Shirley and Dolly Collins - which I intend to examine in this article. The recent death of Dolly Collins should lead to a re-awakening of interest in the Shirley and Dolly LPs of the late 60s - and these albums are of more than casual interest to ISB fans....

In autumn 1967 the Incredibles made one of their first London concert-hall appearances at the Queen Elizabeth Hall - sharing the bill with Shirley and Dolly Collins. "October Songs" was the title of the concert, and it was reviewed ecstatically by the Melody Maker's resident ecstatic hippie, Nick Jones, who recognised an affinity between the musics of the two duos. I would suspect that Joe Boyd may have been the catalyst who brought them together, because the partnership also led to guest appearances on each other's albums. Joe produced Shirley's *The Power of the True Love Knot*, issued on Polydor (583 025) in Spring 1968. It's a selection of traditional songs on the theme of love, showcasing Shirley's "gentle, trance-like [vocal] style" combined with Dolly's distinctive flute-organ, and creating a dreamy, hypnotic effect comparable at times to parts of *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter* - which is surely no accident, as the two records must have been recorded at about the same time. And Dolly contributed, of course, to Hangman's... playing piano on *The Minotaur's Song*, flute-organ on *The Water Song* and doing the harpsichord and harp arrangement for *Waltz of the New Moon*.

Robin and Mike returned the compliment by participating in the *Power of the True Love Knot* sessions, Robin playing shahnai on the "cryptic" *The Maydens Came* (which could almost be one of his own early songs), both of them contributing handclaps (!) to *Seven Yellow Gypsies* (a relative of *Black Jack David/Davy*) and a winning instrumental blend (Mike; Indian finger cymbals and African drum; Robin; Japanese sticks and tin whistle) to the prettiest and most ISB-like track on the record, *Richie Story*.

The most famous Shirley and Dolly Collins album was *Anthem in Eden*, issued in 1969 on EMI's "progressive" label, Harvest, after Shirley and Dolly had done sessions for Peel's *Night Ride* and the central "song-story", "The Anthems" (which takes up all of Side 1) had been broadcast on Radio 1(!) in the previous August. This was to be a very influential album, not least on the later ISB, even if this time they were not present on the sessions. By now the ISB were busy; their career had taken off, so production was by Shirley's husband Austin John Marshall (*producer of the Be Glad film - Ed*) and

Incidentally, the sleeve notes of *Anthem...* ooze 60's idealism: "But today's England has a special generation; from grammar schools and housing estates, from techs and universities are coming enough young men and women with a clear historical and prophetic vision of themselves, enough now to continue the story; no propagandist is going to fool them, or government coerce them: they know that they will inherit the best of their tradition, and to them this, record is fondly dedicated..." Well, let's hope so....

As the ISB moved into Scientology and their "Happy, happy, happy all the time" phase, the music of Shirley and Dolly seemed, by contrast, to grow ever dooier and more melancholy - at least, if the next LP, *Love Death and the Lady* (issued in 1970, also on Harvest), is any indication. (Its elegiac feel seems to prefigure some of the later ISB folk-based songs.) Nevertheless, there are some fine tracks, and for ISB listeners none more interesting than the opening one, a very sombre arrangement of *Death and the Lady* - lyrics and melody are clearly a (or the) source of Robin's *My Name is Death* - so, as Tim Moon suggested, it is based on tradition...

Before *Anthem...* Dolly Collins was also responsible for the instrumental arrangements for the *Young Tradition's* final album *Galleries* (1968: Transatlantic TRA 172), with its mixture of traditional folk and pre-classical art songs

another of the key folk releases of the period. Around then, the YT were performing *Bright Morning Star(s)*, the *Sacred Harp* (not *Sacred Heart*!) song mentioned by Tim Moon in connection with Peter Bellamy's later solo version - I think they may have recorded it for a Peel session, but there is a memorable (and frustratingly rare) live version on an early 1970's sampler from Bill Leader's *Trailer* label, *The Folk Trailer* (LER 2019). There's nothing much wrong with the ISB's version, but still, you have to admit that the YT's powerful unaccompanied singing knocks spots off it.

Of course Shirley Collins was involved in other influential folk-based records, from her collaborations with Davy Graham in the early 1960s to the "electric folk" albums with Ashley Hutchings a decade later. I remember hearing her fondly recall the sessions with the ISB for *The Power of the True Love Knot* in a radio interview. Perhaps *beGLAD* could interview her too?

Editor's note: John, could you please provide Adrian with a contact address?

Robin and Mike and Shirley and Dolly John Quigley

instrumental arrangements (for this LP and the follow-up) by the shooting star of the burgeoning British early music revival, David Munrow, and members of his *Early Music Consort*. Their medieval instruments do occasionally recall the ISB, as do the arrangements - listen in particular to *The Blacksmith*, which sounds suspiciously like the source of the piano/fiddle/soondri (?) passages in Mike's *Rainbow* from *U*. The version of *Lowlands* here seems to have the same tune as a song which Mike sang in a 1971 concert to his own guitar accompaniment - one of the *Painted Chariot / Flowers of the Forest / Spirit Beautiful / Red Hair* etc. song-family - but which was never issued on LP. And *Whitsun Dance*, the song which expresses the origins of the song-story - an elderly lady looking back to an idyllic first love cut short by the slaughter of a whole generation of young men in *World War 1* - might well have inspired Robin's *Darling Belle*, which of course has a similar theme... And on the non-thematic Side 2 of the album, there's a charming version of Robin's *God Dog*, the only "modern" song on the record.

We e³ the ISB

BY TIM DAWSON AND PHIL HARRISON

Have you ever stopped to consider how some things can have an effect on your life that is still evident in some way years later? It was like that with the Incredible String Band. The Beatles probably sowed the musical seeds but it was hearing the ISB that made us want to buy guitars and, in time, write songs which attempted to emulate their styles and sounds.

Since those early days we have played in many bands, sometimes together, sometimes not, but the over-riding factors remain that all these years on we are still playing and enjoying music and those ISB influences still have a habit of manifesting themselves in what we play and the way in which we play it. But the thought still remains, would the urge to perform have been as strong if the impression made by the ISB had not been so vivid and imaginative?

We were introduced to the music of the Incredible String Band by my older brother Pete who had heard them on a record playing in the common room at Derby Art College in 1967. In 1969 I was 13 years old and Phil was 15 years (a very early introduction and one which was to leave a lasting impression). Later that year I remember seeing a list of tour dates in *Melody Maker*; we had listened to the records (*No Sleep Blues* was an early favourite which we can both clearly remember listening to on the Mono portable record player) and so on Halloween 1969 we went to our first ISB Gig at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester. This experience was something of a culture shock and also an introduction/initiation into the magic and mystery of the ISB. Members of the audience were invited to take part in apple-dunking on stage, which looked good fun; we had "bitten the apple" and there was no turning back.

We returned to the Manchester Free Trade Hall again a couple of years later and, after the gig, spent the night in the YMCA which was an interesting place. I had just remarked to Phil that the building was a bit like a ship when at precisely the next moment a sailor walked down the stairs, surreal but true and not an illegal substance in sight.

Phil and myself had started to play guitar and write songs. We were influenced by the Increds and particularly the idea of no musical barriers and lots of different styles.

We loved their music and to us the ISB was The Band.

We followed their musical development and when they took to electrical instruments we did the same. Phil remembers that the first song he learnt to play on the guitar was *Greatest Friend*; Phil's rhythm style was very influenced by Mike Herons percussive strumming style.

Between 1969 and 1974 we went to five ISB Gigs, Manchester Free Trade Hall twice, Nottingham twice (Albert Hall and Playhouse) and Penzance. Whilst on holiday in Newquay, we couldn't believe our luck when we saw an advertised coach trip to Penzance to see the ISB. This was another interesting experience: a coach load of surf mad ISB fans all reading surf magazines, a somewhat incongruous image. (ISB go Beach Boys). The final gig we went to was at the Nottingham Playhouse. There was something about an ISB concert that we didn't experience at other concerts, it was probably our love for the music and the mystery and awe of adolescence. A feeling which the cover of *The Hangmans Beautiful Daughter* still evokes.

So far we have only mentioned the influence of RW and MH but this would be to underestimate the effects of Rose and Licorice on us during our formative adolescent years, in particular the sound of their voices and Rose's bass playing which became an integral part of the ISB sound at that time. Also, at the risk of being sexist the image of long hair and flowing dresses influenced our choice of girlfriends. The theatrical and humorous approach of Malcolm Le Maistre (along with some good songs, like 'Down Before Cathay') also features high in our ISB memories.

Clive Palmer's *Empty Pocket Blues* was probably the first Incredible String Band song to creep into the repertoire of one of our early bands - back in the 1970's! Another was Mike's *Log Cabin Home*. Phil has sort of double regret associated with Clive. Around 1977 he was on holiday in St Ives at the same time as the local music festival. He didn't realise Clive had been playing there until the day after his performance and then, to make matters worse, passed him walking through one of the narrow St Ives streets carrying an instrument case, and being at that time young and modest etc. just had not got the bottle to stop him and have a chat. It's funny how from time to time these things

still have a habit of coming back to haunt you.

Phil and myself have played in bands ever since our mid teens. We have followed the separate careers of RW and MH, attending gigs and buying records, enjoying their music all through the years. In the late 1970s we travelled to London to see Robin's Merry Band and before the concert met Robin on the steps of the theatre and had a brief chat (a good start to the evening!). A few years later Phil was after a copy of the *Glenrow Tapes*. He was given a telephone number to ring through *Folk Roots* or some similar magazine. He did and who answered but Mike Heron, much to Phil's surprise and pleasure.

The Incredible String Band's eclectic approach worked extremely well for them and has also influenced our appreciation of many styles of music. Phil also believes that ultimately the divergence of ISB styles led to their downfall as MH increasingly moved towards rock while RW seemed to remain faithful to his Celtic roots. This has also caused us some difficulties with our own musical ventures as the styles in our set list have on occasions changed from song to song; this has sometimes perplexed our listeners not to mention other band members!

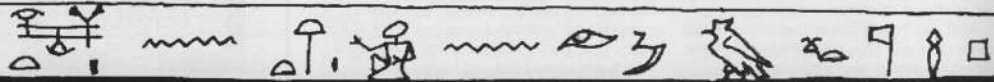
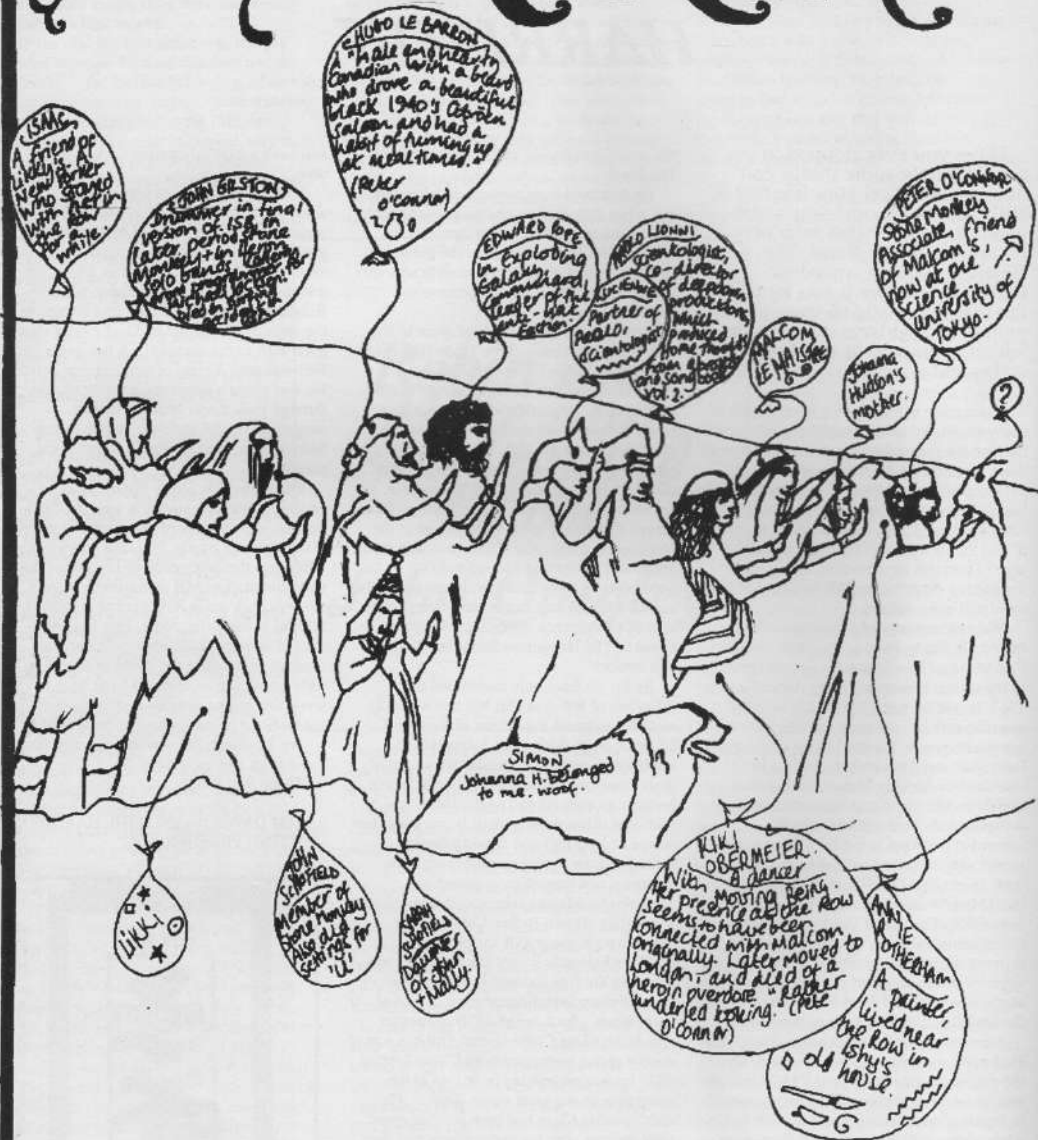
We, however, know where this approach came from and are glad of it.

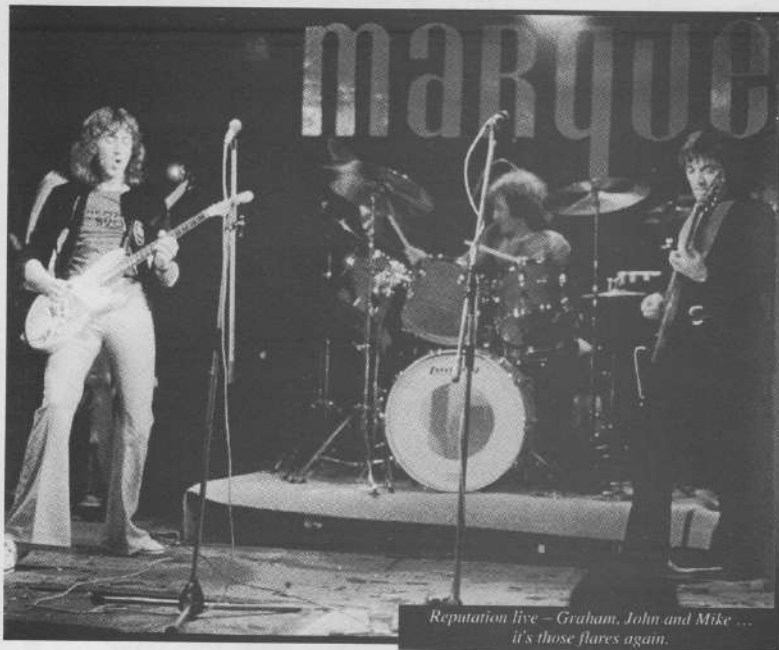
Thank you ISB.

TIM DAWSON AND PHIL HARRISON
(SPITTING FEATHERS)



MYRRH





It's not so often that an ex-ISB member actually offers to write us an article (hint to Mr Williamson), so when Graham Forbes expressed interest, I jumped at the chance...

ISB - The View From the Amps

I had heard about the String Band when I was still at school in Glasgow. A friend used to go watch them at a club in Sauchiehall Street but unfortunately they'd moved off by the time I got round to going to see them. I was more into Blues music at the time... I had started playing guitar at 14 and all I really wanted to do was be a blues guitarist. It would be romantic to say that my first influences were Robert Johnson or people like that but in fact it was a friend of Mike's - Stevie Winwood. I heard a B side of a Spencer Davies Group single called Stevie's Blues and that was it. Glasgow was a wild town at the time - still is - and everyone was into Tamla Motown. Some neds threw me out of the cafe I was in when I put it on the Juke Box. All I did after that was try to learn to play blues music.

I loved the second two ISB albums and spent a lot of teenage time sitting in safe havens in Glasgow with those covers on my knees with a few other people who shared the same...well...interests. Glasgow was a hard drinking town and people like us who had hair halfway down our backs were rather looked down upon to say the least. In retrospect we were spiritually arrogant... thought we knew it all and that we alone were interested in other realities... but it was a wonderful time.

By the time I was 22 I was playing full time in a rock band called Powerhouse unless, of course, someone needed a wedding band and we'd change our name accordingly. We didn't play anything different except maybe an instrumental first waltz. We were loud and heavy and played anywhere naive

enough to book us. Sometimes we'd just turn up at pubs, unload our gear and play. Or I would go out and talk my way on-stage at some folk club and play blues instrumentals or something. Then I'd get the band up and we'd play some electric blues. I was upsetting the folkies even then, I suppose! Anything to be on-stage in front of an audience. I remember I used to play bottleneck with a plate. God knows why. Anyway, I clearly remember standing in Edinburgh one day and suddenly knowing that one day I was going to play with the String Band. It just came to me out of nowhere as these things usually do. This was a surprise because although I loved a great deal of WTBH and earlier material I have to say I found things like Be Glad rather disappointing.

I bumped into Mike one day in a waiting room about a year later. It was an entirely chance meeting. I liked Smiling Men and decided to chance my arm and offered him the services of my band back in Glasgow if he was doing another solo album and wanted backing. I really had no plans to leave Powerhouse - we shared a crazy band flat in Glasgow in the student area in which we did all the things young rock bands do, agents knew which pub to telephone if they needed a band in a hurry and all the other bands in Glasgow hated us. We loved it. I see the other two guys from time to time. Both are still playing - what else can you do? One lives in New Zealand and the other still lives in a bedsit in the University area. Both are alcoholics. I played with them again after

MHR but I kind of saw the writing on the wall and have been off the "swallow" for about 14 years. I'm wealthier but I think they have better fun!

I had no idea I was being auditioned

So Mike did call me and asked me to go down to Glen Row where he played me some tapes, then asked me to stay over for a week and dub on guitar parts. I had no idea I was being auditioned for the ISB. I got the bus back to Glasgow and carried on doing the chaotic gigs we did, trying to avoid irate parents and lawyers and then I had a call from Mike asking if I'd be interested in joining the band? (Actually I think I got the gig because I suspect Richard Thompson turned it down). I had ten days rehearsal for a three month tour of Europe and the UK... Oh and yes, could I learn the banjo part for Log Cabin and a keyboard part for Everything's Fine. Both instruments I'd never touched before! It was great!

A major change was happening to the Band which really started with Mike writing Ithkos. On the first British Tour I did with the group we had been supported on about 40 gigs - tours really were tours in these days - by McGuinness Flint who had just had a number one chart single and been on TOTP and all that stuff. A large proportion of the audience were young kids who never knew anything about the early albums and had come to see McGuinness Flint. While some die hard ISB fans didn't like Ithkos-actually I wrote a small part of that. (*Port of Sybaris*, which comes after the *Dreams Fade bit* - Ed)

- a lot did and they were augmented by these new audiences. When Robin got going on jigs and reels they went crazy. We were playing Cardiff once and I will never forget the look on Robin's face when there was a stage invasion - suddenly all these kids were up on the stage grabbing everyone. Nothing like it had happened before.

I loved playing with the band and being on the road and shared a great many common viewpoints with the guys but there were one or two people associated with the group with whom I didn't get on too well. I just felt they took themselves rather too seriously. And to be fair, I was a good bit younger and one or two people probably (rightly) regarded my rock and roll lifestyle as not quite ISB. But I was a bit like a kid at Christmas, it was all very exciting and I felt touring in a band should be fun. All this world is but a play... So when the tour ended at Oxford at Christmas 1973 I really didn't think I'd be invited back.

Oddly enough I was asked back and in January 1974 was introduced to a new drummer called John Gilston who had played on No Ruinous Feud and was up at the Row to audition. I was asked if I would like to nominate anyone and suggested the drummer from Powerhouse but the second I heard Gillie I had absolutely no doubts. He was one of the finest drummers I have ever heard and a truly beautiful person. It sounds very schoolboyish but very soon John and I were best friends.

Robin was never really happy about the electric direction

Now as most people know the String Band was really two groups. Robin would arrange his material and we would more or less do as he wanted and Mike would do similarly with his songs. Robin was never really happy about the electric direction the Band was taking although I must say he is a truly breathtaking musician. He could play anything.

With Gillie and myself pushing hard, Mike felt far more able to develop the rock material which he had been interested in for years. Whereas Robin tended to live quietly with Janet and tankards of hot spiced punch of a winter's evening, Mike was far more likely to be out raving with Steve Marriott or hanging out with Pete Townshend or someone. So Mike's writing really took a far rockier turn and I think some of his best stuff dates from this time. Strong Thing and Draw Back the Veil were ISB songs which we did on the last tour. Stranded in Iowa was another. Without meaning any disrespect to Mike, who I see regularly and like a great deal, I feel these songs lost a lot in later Reputation days when they became over elaborate and elongated.

When John joined, the band immediately became immeasurably tighter and more musically organised and the audiences kept growing and growing. The ISB were not banned from TV in Europe as they were in Britain and I recall one TV show we broadcast over the whole of Europe. Just us, no chat, no twee folk singers - just the band

doing an hour long session. It didn't do us any harm.

We played in Denmark and where Status Quo got 17,000 the night before, we pulled 25,000. We did three shows in the same day in Rome and they had the riot police out with hoses because there were so many people locked out. A very famous group which Mike and Robin seemed to have a considerable dislike for were booked to support us in Zurich. They pulled out much to our amusement. (They were even in a rehearsal room upstairs from ours in London once and apparently on hearing we were downstairs immediately vanished to the pub!)

There is no doubt the band's following was building by the week. Of course, in true ISB fashion, we managed to antagonise the press when the person responsible for ensuring they got passes into our gigs apparently wouldn't allow them into a gig in Dreary Lane in London. That was a great pity since there must have been a thousand over the hall's capacity inside. A hell of a lot of people had just bribed the doormen or something - it was astonishing - the place was literally packed, the aisles, bodies everywhere. Among others, four busloads of "new" fans had travelled all the way from Newcastle. Our contract was up for renewal and Island were not showing any great interest in keeping us on the label. A good bit of press at that moment could have changed everything.

Remarkable rock violin and astounding Hammond organ

We peaked in the US Tour in 1974. I have to give Robin credit because, even though I'm sure he disliked a lot of the new material, he wrote Jack Straw's Wishes which was a remarkable piece of musicianship. He played rock violin on that better than anyone I have ever heard before or since. Completely out of nowhere he started playing these astonishing solos. The audiences in America used to give him ovations every gig. Mike too was outstanding on Hammond Organ on this piece - I have a recording from New York which unfortunately just cuts out as he gets going on it.

Robin was clearly uncomfortable on this tour. Janet was away in LA the entire time and he definitely was not at his best without her. Robin is an extraordinary person - he is definitely not of our time. He is a visitor here. There is no-one else in this world who could have written Maya or The Iron Stone or My Name is Death and so on. Not Dylan, nobody. One day scholars will study these works. But he needed someone to look after him in this 20th century world. He couldn't drive, I don't recall ever seeing him with money and wonder if he knew what it was. I could truly sympathise with how ill at ease Robin felt surrounded by all these amplifiers and cables and roadies and effects units but despite this he really excelled on the tour, even though I suspect he hated a great deal of it. And of course, the young American girls just loved this Greek God although I don't think he noticed. I remember persuading him to do some acoustic songs alone in the

middle of the set and he started to do First Girl I Loved again at this time.

We did gigs with Bruce Springsteen and I remember thinking that Mike was similar but could write far more intriguing lyrics. That was the entire point of Mike's writing - he was saying things that were really interesting within a rock framework. A great deal of rock is basically groin music and while that is definitely OK it was interesting to hear Mike input rather more challenging concepts. I know there were String Band diehards who were dead against this sort of thing - although I think playing live the Band catered for everyone. The thing that made the String Band what they were was the fact that Robin and Mike were so innovative. All that Mike was doing by developing in a rockier direction was continuing that tradition, and I was surprised that some people couldn't see that and move along with the Band to see where it would lead.

There was something ominous in the air

The band just got better and better - if, of course, you liked the mixture of rock and esoteric which really was the first sort of World music that people such as Peter Gabriel do now. We were supporting another major American act in front of about 10,000 people in Cape Cod or somewhere and playing so well that their roadies were ordered to pull the plug on us. It was all very exciting. But there was something ominous in the air.

It all ended rather unhappily in New York. Neighborhood Records wanted to sign us and to continue touring the US and become a major commercial band. This was probably Robin's worst nightmare and the final meeting between Mike and Robin was not a happy one. Basically they both began acting like human beings and that was it. Even Suzie, who was one of the finest managers of people I have ever known, couldn't calm the situation. The band had a world tour contracted at that point and to this day I regret that the group did not do a farewell tour and live album. Apart from anything else I think the people who had supported the Band all through the years deserved a lot better than a few lines in the British music press. And it is a shame that, strictly speaking, Hard Rope is the closest album to what we were doing at the time although the last String Band album is probably the first Mike Heron's Reputation album.

I had offers from two other interesting groups at the time: I had been wondering how long the band was likely to continue and was on the point of accepting one, but when Mike asked John and I to stay with him I had no hesitation in accepting and we put Reputation together for him. Mike wanted Malcolm in the Band, and while I liked and respected him, it was a major mistake both for the Band and for Malcolm. Malcolm's career would have benefited greatly had he struck out on his own at that point. He had a very unusual style and I think he should have developed that on his own or gone into theatre itself - in fact a few years later John

and I financed him in a show at the Edinburgh Festival. I think Mike just didn't have the confidence to front Reputation alone but pieces like Malcolm's Streetlight thing together with Malcolm's on-stage antics really distracted from Mike's intensely powerful material. I mean, the world was falling over itself for punk on one hand and soul on the other and we had this guy tap dancing in the middle of the set!

I left Reputation in 1975 ...

MHR really were a US band but unfortunately things went very seriously wrong with our deal with Neighborhood Records in New York. Mike would have loved major commercial success in the States as much as Robin would have hated it. There were a number of factors why it didn't happen which had nothing to do with the music and it soon became clear it wasn't going to happen. I left in 1975, very disillusioned, and played with a number of other bands. John left about a year later, maybe less, and went on to be one of LA's top session men. He pioneered electronic drums and it is him you hear on five of the top ten selling singles in America in 1983. Thriller, Flashdance, Maniac, all that stuff. He played with everybody. We stayed best pals and to be honest it broke my bloody heart when he drowned in Malibu. We had spoken that



Guitar heroics on Ifthkas

morning. I was planning to go out there to work with him and live in L.A. We used to send each other tapes and there was one in his car he was dictating to me when he was driving to the beach. Very, very sad.

I own a couple of successful companies now and don't do a huge amount of playing. I have two sons I'm very close to and if I'm not doing things with them I'm out hill walking or on my mountain bike or rock climbing. I'm not a good rock climber, but then who is after the age of 22? I do get a tremendous buzz from it though, very similar to the excitement of playing. In fact I seem to have broken a finger climbing last weekend. Not exactly conducive to guitar playing. I love standing on the tops of mountains watching sunset. A lot of people take delight in pointing out surrounding mountains and naming them and all that stuff but frankly I haven't a clue what most of them are called. I prefer to see them as they were thousands of years ago and of course, they didn't have names then.

MANFRED AND MIKE....

IN WHICH THE SCOTTISH SPRINGSTEEN

MEETS THE JO'BURG JAZZROCKER... By Adrian Whittaker

It's always seemed a bit strange, the links between Manfred Mann and Mike Heron; you can't really imagine them sharing the bill at UFO, or exchanging information on modal tunings on the harmonica rack circuit. Greg Russo's biography of MM turned up for review at Be Glad Towers recently, and this exhaustive historical discography has filled in some of the gaps.

The connection began in 1976, when Mike signed 'Heron' to Lillian and Gerry Bron's Bronze Records and thus became a label-mate with the Earth Band; it was Lillian Bron who initially set up the songwriting connection. Unpredictable cover versions are something of a MM speciality, I now realise; over his 30 year career he's made a habit of picking obscure songs or obscure songwriters, always with strong lyrics, adding his own distinctive arrangements and turning them into radio-friendly hit material. Another recurrent trait (see *Iowa*) is that absolute lyrical fidelity is often sacrificed in favour of a version which conveys the essence or the atmosphere of the original. In the past, MM had tackled obscure Dylan songs (Mighty Quinn, Please Mrs Henry) as well as early Randy Newman, John Simon, Robbie Robertson and Joni Mitchell.

He was looking for a distinctive selection of covers to introduce a Mark II version of the Earth Band on *Roaring Silence* and liked the way Heron's lyrics painted very colourful pictures. His soulful treatment of *Dolphins* sits well alongside the Springsteen-penned hit *Blinded by the Light*. *Dolphins* is an unusually faithful version, and remains my favourite of the MMEB covers.

1978's *Watch* was slated to include *Stranded in Iowa*, but MM felt his version of this very idiosyncratic song didn't come up to scratch, so the next Heron song to get the treatment was *Don't kill it Carol* (Angel Station 1979). An edited version was chosen as the next single, taking Mike's tale of ignominy in the Crown Bar, Edinburgh, circa 1965 to no. 45 in the UK charts and into the top 25 in Germany - it was even released as a 12" and as a rather fetching 7" picture disc, currently fetching high prices on the collector's scene. A live, edited version of *Carol* later made it onto various incarnations of the *Budapest* live album in 1984. MM gives it a poppy, voice-box dominated treatment which sounds rather dated now.

1980's *Chance* ended the trilogy of Heron covers. *Stranded in Iowa* was exhumed from the vaults, taken apart and effectively rewritten, retaining little of the original but the mood and the chorus. It'd be interesting to see the composition credits on this one! File under synth-rock.

In 1988, MM started work on *Plains Music*, a largely instrumental album based almost entirely on North American Indian melodies. Despite obvious links with Mike's interests here (*Blackfoot Side* etc), it was for the album's one African tune, *Sikelele* (an Xhosa chant) that Mike was approached to provide lyrics. *Sikelele* was added to the original project in a deliberate attempt to have at least one accessible, radio and record-company friendly track on the album. It was co-written over the phone! Contrary to rumour, it wasn't a hit single in South Africa, but the album was released there and did well on some local charts.

The story ends there for now, though the reformation of the Earth Band this summer conjures up some interesting possibilities. I favour a keyboard and harmony vocal laden version of Robert Johnson myself.



GERMAN 12" OF "CAROL"

Now that this has been added to the re-release list, I thought it would be interesting to have another look at the album, with some help from Mike himself and from Graham Forbes.

In some ways, it's the String Band LP that never was; on their last American tour, the ISB did quite a few songs now better known as solo Heron numbers (see Graham's article). Evie was written in the ISB's period at Glenrow - Graham remembers Mike and Susie proudly unveiling it there.

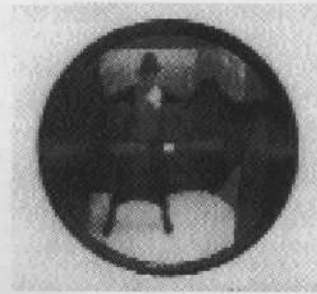
The ISB had left Island records and signed with Neighbourhood, so they duly went into the studios in the States at the end of their '74 tour with Peter Schekeryk as producer. His approach to recording was not one which all the band were happy with; rather than doing a succession of endless takes and selecting the best (the traditional ISB modus operandi), Schekeryk adopted a layered approach, painstakingly laying down one instrument at a time in countless retakes. Robin, particularly, hated this method, but other Band members weren't too happy with Schekeryk's reliance on session musicians ("Nashville guys", according to Graham). Coupled with this, there seems to have been a push from Neighbourhood to do more "commercial" songs, which would probably have meant less of Robin's compositions on the ensuing album. The sessions were abandoned, though Evie and Meanwhile the Rain were later salvaged for the Heron LP - hence the presence of Robin and Schekeryk production credits on those two tracks. What exactly happened next is still a bit unclear.

Mike says (in Grahame Hood's interview):

"In the middle of all this, Robin decided to leave. It would have been hard to choose a worse time, me and Susie, who was my wife at that time and was the manageress, we were responsible for this

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PICTURE DISC OF "CAROL"

touring band of guys and we were stuck in New York and we had this deal that was kind of mentioned so we went to Schekeryk and said Robin and I kind of fell out just over the way.. cause we knew he had to leave and it was looking that way, that he would, it was just the way it happened, it put us so much in it we didn't speak for..

Grahame: *"Did you not think of continuing as the ISB?"*

Mike: *"Never. It never occurred to me. I thought that would be impossible really, because we were always 50/50 writers, so I never thought we could do that. So I went to Schekeryk and said would you be interested in doing it as a Mike Heron album with the rest of the band and he said yes."*

In fact, the ISB missed out on what would have been their biggest tour ever. Dates had been set up in Australia, Europe and in the States.

After this hiatus, the recording sessions started again in Olympic Studios on October 1974, this time using the "Reputation" live band nucleus of Mike, Graham, John Gilston and Malcolm, and with Mike producing. The resulting album has a freshness and a homogeneity which speaks very directly to the listener.

Down on my Knees is still one of my favourite morning songs. I'd always seen it as a 'beginning of the end' song - not so, according to Mike:

"It was written after an absolutely terrible gig on the last tour, in the Deep South. The audience were very reserved - a bit like a grown up Senior Prom. It was as if they were on a different planet. So that was the beginning of the song - but it kind of grew into a love song to someone living in the States, coupled with an awareness of a culture gap that can't be bridged."

"Easy Street was written to ensure a particular atmosphere - I'd been reading those 40's, 50's Barney Kessel-type jazz guitar books and it was an attempt to create

something in that style."

"Evie - now that really was about the love of my life! Yes, she was a real person and that was her real name - she was my first proper girlfriend when I was a teenager, listening to music together, all that stuff..Funnily enough, I met her again quite recently..."

Residential Boy is about Mike's childhood friendship with Alastair Watson ('Atty'). You should read his sleeve notes to 'In Concert' for the full story. Anyway, *"It's about the lure of the countryside idyll to a couple of suburban kids - who wouldn't really know what to do if they had to navigate by the Pole star."*

Without Love is a lyrical construct, and another go at writing a song in a particular musical style - "a country ballad, I suppose" says Mike. Born to be Gone was always known to Graham Forbes as "that song about the deid dog" and Wine of his Song started off as Son of Evie (it's also about Buddy Holly) but ended up taking on a rather more poppy life of its own. Though I really like Meanwhile the Rain, I must confess I'd never thought too much about the scenario in the song. It's a composition Mike is very proud of and, guess what it's about: *"Well, sixteen year old angst, I guess you'd say - about being at home studying and having these fantasies which you know are unreal. Not really the kind of thing you could get up to when you're living at home with your parents..."*

So - if you haven't played Reputation recently, dig it out again and listen with fresh ears! If you don't have it, order the Unique Gravity re-release. Credit should go to Mark Anstey for doing a particularly nice job on the CD booklet. The fact that it plugs **beGLAD** has no bearing on this comment whatsoever.

Adrian Whittaker

While Mike was down in London for the 12-Bar gigs, Be Glad (and Rock'n'Reel) dispatched Grabame Hood to the Coptborne Tara Hotel for a wide-ranging chat about the Edinburgh rock scene, songwriting and the Acoustic Band....

Furry waistcoats and maracas

Before the Incredibles you were talking about various rock bands you were in you mentioned Rock Bottom and the Deadbeats. Can you tell me about that period? Were they like schoolboy rock bands?

Well there were a couple of different kinds. Have you heard of Tam White at all? Well he was in some of the kinds of bands I was in, R & B really, Rock Bottom and the Deadbeats was one of these I think. It was little furry waistcoats and maracas, you know the kind of thing?

What sort of places did you play, pubs?

Mostly dance halls really. Little tiny dances, sometimes functions, engagement parties.

How old were you then? 18 or 19?

A bit earlier than that, I was in different ones a jazzy skiffle one (where he met Gerard Don't Ed) and R&B - all at the same time, and one called The Saracens which I suppose would be like The Hollies, it was a four piece. Early sixties.

Did you do a lot of gigs?

Lots of little gigs, there were lots of little dances - there weren't many gigs where you sat and listened to stuff but there were lots of social dances and parties to do, there seemed to be a lot of work but it was all of that type. And then Dylan coincided with over here the folk clubs becoming something that was not really folk clubs, it became the kind of gathering place of the time and all these people used to roll into the folk clubs and would listen to the artist and I was slightly kind of brought over to that. That was initially what got me out of the rock bands because there was no chance anybody was going to listen to the songs, they were either going to dance or not and I saw something else happening on the folk scene and saw that I could fit in on the edge of that. My interest started in watching Robin and Clive, they were in a folk club every Tuesday.

Did anyone you played with (in the rock bands) become well known?

Not really, they all became surveyors - some stayed in music.

Tam White was around Edinburgh when I lived there (mid 70s.) He played in pubs and was known for doing Dylan's "Hurricane".

Did you see him with the big brass section? He had this amazing big band but they couldn't really get the gigs. They had a residency in the Rutland Hotel for a while, that was great.

The line (from Love Light) "At night I would sing in the Crown Bar" brought me

down it was emptier day by day" - what period does that refer to?

It wasn't true. It's another song about Carol as in Don't Kill It Carol, my girlfriend at that time...I was playing in the rock bands at that time and just about to cross over into the String Band.

When I saw the film (Be Glad) there was a bit when you were going in to your cottage - was that in Pumpherton?

It was Roman Camps. At Broxburn. It's really desirable. It's all been done up. I haven't seen it but someone was telling me. It started off with people buying them, they were always occupied.

There's a scene with the bings (colloquial Scots term for shale heaps) all behind, it looked more like Pumpherton....

Roman Camps is almost built on the bings....

So what made you go there, it's a pretty

bizarre place to live?

Like it's on the moon or somewhere - quite suitable I suppose! It's actually where I lived when I left home so it was quite a good bizarre place to go to...

We had a reissue campaign...

Sensible questions now! The CD reissues of the ISB stuff. What effect did that have on you personally, obviously you were pleased to see it happen?

Yeah well I kind of caused it. What was happening was suddenly we were getting no sales in America and I could see it was going to happen everywhere and no records would be available so I thought I'm going to have to do some thing about this. So I got in touch with Mark (Anstey) and the two of us kind of had a campaign - we started with Island and we managed to get to Chris Blackwell's secretary and he was just moving out of the business about to sell it He didn't really care actually and he said OK. And then once we got him we phoned Warners and said - you've got the best albums, why are you not putting them out? (Laughs) And eventually we got them all out. So yes, it was a personal achievement to do that because I don't think anyone would have bothered, really. The units are so small for a big record company, but I think it would have been awful if it was totally unavailable. Just as a kind of side light on the mainstream of musical things that were happening, it's interesting to have it there to refer to, and if it was completely gone that would be a shame so I'm very pleased.

You talk about small sales - what kind of figures?

I don't really know, not much.

Is it people who had them on vinyl first time round?

Perhaps they should do a survey - Germany is buying a few. The Ryko ones - have you come across them? What happened was that they got bunged out here by Warners and then Joe Boyd got hold of the original engineer John Wood, and the two of them took them into the studio and remixed them and put them out on the Ryko label and they are amazing 'cause they're the same recordings but mixed with the kind of sound that one expects to hear from the sitar and the acoustic guitar sound - just amazing with the technology that wasn't available then.

What do you think of the reviews of the reissued stuff being reviewed in the context of today's music? Did you feel they were reviewed fairly?

I can't say that I've been pricked by any reviews.

Do you feel the ISB has been treated well by history? I know that rock history constantly rewrites itself and you have bands like the Velvet Underground and even The Doors being more important and influential now than they were at the time and people naturally assume this was always the case. Do you think you've been forgotten, the way things have turned out?

Not really, because we were always quite a minority. We were never a mainstream band, and it's always kept like that. The price you pay for that is not being very rich, but I suppose it's not too bad. I do feel very comfortable with nearly all the stuff because its not really done for any fashionable reasons. It was done from a pure reason if you like, if you want to be wimpy about it, and I think that does last over the years, you know, and some of the songs particularly Robins sounded weird then, and now are really quite acceptable things to write about like The Iron Stone. At the time you thought..... a kind of weird subject, whereas now that would be totally acceptable for many a group to write a song about.

Do you feel that many modern bands have even heard of the ISB?

I don't know - there might be a few enthusiasts out there. We had the convention, that was amazing where they took the hotel over two years ago, that was fantastic.

Post- ISB bands

Did the Reputation line-up actually tour?

It changed a bit, but we did tour, we did a tour - or was that later on? We did a tour

second on the bill to Procol Harum somewhere in Germany.

That was the "Diamond Of Dreams" band.

You know better than me! So I don't think the Reputation band did tour. *(It did - Ed.)*

Do you still play with Graham Forbes?

He doesn't really play guitar any more, right enough we did definitely do some Pete Drummond radio shows, I think with that band. He's got tapes of all that kind of stuff. He would know what we did. I still keep in touch but he's a kind of businessman who

because it's about the place and a girl called Florence.

Na! It was just about the place, that must just be interpretation... These things kind of bleed over from different eras....

The DOD period - was there a desire to play again, there being a gap since Reputation?

We signed to Bronze records.

It was a good band, you may not remember but it was! Very tight.

Frank was the cornerstone of it, really. He and I put it together.

You probably know most of the stuff that's on it because it's ended up on the Glenrow tapes. Frank and I were thinking we needed to do a nicely produced album and Frank was reading this article about Hugh Murphy; before that I had signed a publishing deal which gave me money to make demos of songs as I wrote them, that was with Chappells. So I piled up these demos, things like Mexican Girl, lots of them - I've got them in my book! So we had those demos and Frank read about Hugh Murphy who was rather flavour of the month then - he'd done

Baker Street (Gerry Rafferty) and everyone wanted him to do thing like Leo Sayer albums that his heart wasn't really into. We just happened to catch him at the time, we had the demos and it was just what he was looking for, as he could see himself being pulled in another direction that he wasn't that happy with. It was just our luck. So it was him (Murphy) that got us the record deal, him and Susie (Watson-Taylor).

Casablanca was an odd label to sign with - ISB and Donna Summer?

Hugh knew this agent guy who placed deals with record labels. He knew Casablanca and that's how it went there.... It disappeared very quickly because the company went bust, which is why I did the Glenrow Tapes, because I thought all these songs would be completely lost.

Did you use a band?

Me and Frank really, and Jon Bavin on keyboards who then went and did engineering stuff and studio building for the Eurythmics. He went to America to work for them, they set up a studio facility, and he designed a studio for Bob Dylan. So that was his claim to fame. *(Also playing were Mel Collins and Pete Wingfield - Ed.)*

Did Frank Usher come from Peebles?



He's a Geordie, Newcastle,

Gateshead. But he came and settled in Innerleithen in... he's the one who's been in The Row longest apart from me so it would be 1970 or something.

You did a little tour, about 87/88?

Can't remember... I think we did a kind of limping tour, it didn't really manage to get off the ground. It was very electric. It was too microphone waving *(that's what he said!)* for the audience that were interested in seeing me didn't want that degree... of electricity...

Now we're down to a trio

So how long has the acoustic band been going?

The acoustic band was formed out of



MIKE HERON'S REPUTATION

Promo photo - left to right John Gilston, Dave Barker, Mike, Mike Tomich, Graham Forbes, Malcolm

plays bass in a little band at night.

I remember someone saying Florence and Nijinsky were part of the later ISB repertoire?

No. Nijinsky maybe. I don't think Florence ever was.

I remember seeing the DOD band and you did Nijinsky and Florence.

Did we? I remember the version of Florence that we did after that that ended up on the Glenrow tapes.

I saw the DOD band twice - the first time you were with Procol Harum at Edinburgh University and then you played at Tiffany's dancehall in Stockbridge. Malcolm said something about Florence being ambiguous

Sold on your Love/Portland Rose came after that? One-off single?

That was Bruce Finlay. *(See Bruce article this issue - Ed)*

How long did you tour for?

It seemed quite a long time. I think we did a lot of gigs but I can't be more specific.

I think the Procol gig was in winter and the Tiffany's one the following spring.

We did a tour of Germany with Procol, I do remember that and I remember doing some stuff in Amsterdam.

A nicely produced album

Where does the Casablanca album fit in to this?

promoting the (reissued ISB) CDs. What happened was people got bored with interviewing me and the radio people said "we've heard it all before about these CDs, but if you had a band we would put it on". So that's why I formed it. Three years ago?

Your first gig was in Stow I believe?

Yeah. It was pretty ropey! (Laughs)

Are the acoustic band full-time musicians?

Yeah, Dave is still holding on to a job by a thread. But the others are. We've now kind of slightly adapted - because they are professional musicians they have to make a living, so Stuart's gone off to the holiday camps for 6 months. He's doing Haggerston Castle (near Berwick) and these kind of places, they have a circuit of holiday camps. So now we're down to a trio; just two guitars and percussion. It's actually rather nice. It's more acoustic. The thing about fretless bass is Stuart's such a glorious player, but the sound itself really dominates, really takes a central position, and we're finding it interesting just doing it as a trio.

Are you getting a lot of work?

We did for a while but it all went a bit quiet because we concentrated on doing the album. We're just picking it up now, but I think we will. We want to work, get viable gigs. It might be easier with the trio.

Can we talk about songwriting in general? Inspiration... do you read a lot of biographies? In a lot of your songs you put yourself in the position of an historical figure and write a song about an experience they've had...

Yes - I like reading about people who've had interesting lives. It's a vehicle - if you have the reference of reading about someone you can put the feeling you want to into that - like "Gauguin" for instance, which is not really about Gauguin but it's incorporating various thoughts into the picture you get.

Do you have a method? Do you wake up and think... oh, "that's a nice chord sequence"?

I've kind of forgotten it - I tend to do it in waves and I haven't really done much lately but another wave might be approaching... So that's one thing I do, I do it in batches. For instance, the "Smiling Men" album was all written on a holiday in America in a month. I remember drinking vast amounts of coffee to the point of... (laughs) so I came back and said to Joe Boyd "I've got these songs" and he said "I don't think you should do these with the String Band"; we had a lot of material at that time and Joe had the idea of getting different people that he knew to play on the tracks.

Were they all String Band fans, the people who played on those tracks?

I don't know but they were interested enough in it as an odd kind of music that they were happy to come along and play. And they all liked Joe - he was very street-cred at that time. Someone like John Cale, he never would have come across had it not been for Joe, he really set up those partnerships very well. Steve Winwood was there but I don't think he ended up on anything did he? We tried a couple of things but it didn't quite take off - but we kept friendly - he came and

visited me and stayed in the Hydro (Peebles' famous hotel).

Have you got a recording studio in Glen Row?

Well we did have a studio at the time of the Glen Row tapes, when Jon was there and he had a little studio in his house.

Recording Mystics

Where do you record demos?

We do it at Dave's, the percussionist's house. He's got a set up. For the album we took equipment out of Palladium Studio in Loanhead (south of Edinburgh, a mining town). It's actually closed now but it was a great studio, I'll go off on this one, it's very interesting! The guy was Demis Roussos' keyboard player and his wife was a backing singer so they made a fortune!

And ended up in Loanhead?

Well that's where his dad was! It's a great story, can we talk about him instead? So he (the keyboard player) bunged all his money into equipment, he was always touring abroad, and bought all this expensive equipment and put it in his father's studio. His father used to have the Palladium theatre in Edinburgh, that'll be before your time. I remember seeing Jack Milroy in pantomime there. So that how he ended up in Loanhead and he married this girl and built up the studio and it was really quite successful. Robbie Robertson recorded there and quite a lot of famous people, but now it's gone the other way, but before it closed we got really good equipment out of it and put it into Dave's cottage in the country and did a lot of the recording there, and then finished it up in another studio.

Most of the stuff on the current album is actually 2/3 years old, isn't it?

Nothing spotless.

Any significance in the title of the album?

It's a kind of parallel quote to "Smiling Men With Bad Reputations" which is on the back of Timothy Leary's list of people...

...to beware of?

No, not to beware of, to hang out with, it's a positive person to have a trip with. In the Leary Book Of The Dead, he lists things to be wary of, and smiling men with bad reputations are good people to hang out with.

That got misquoted in the magazine, it said Joe Boyd didn't know what it meant and they found out it was from the Timothy Leary book, people to beware of.

No it's the other way round. It would have been more weedy if it was that! Anyway this is another parallel quote and it is "a bad trip is drowning where the mystics swim" which I thought was quite a nice quote so that's where that comes from, I don't know who it originates with. I know people have quoted it but I don't know who it was came up with it originally.

That's all my questions. Anything else you want to say?

Not really. I'd just like people to buy the album but you can't say that. It's a bit crude. Mike says please buy the album!

What are your future plans, just to carry on with the current band?

I'd like to work a lot with them, but we're

just at a quiet thing at the moment, it's not really happening. There's a few things possible, but we could do with a chunk of work.

Festivals?

I'd love to do festivals, but we can't get them - we couldn't as a four piece. My theory is we might get things as a three piece just because of the mobility of not having a backline. Just having the percussion and two guitars its possible to do second on the bill to people, that kind of stuff, you never know, but we're probably too late for this year's festivals. We do have an agent who's meant to find these things. If a lot of people buy the album the interest may increase.

Reviews of the album?

The only one I've seen was in Mojo - it said it was really good, but they are tending to review my album and Robin's which is totally different, so it tends to say mine are good songs and approachable and his is hard to get into - which is neither here nor there! They should review our albums separately because there isn't much of a connection.

Connections

Do you see much of Robin?

We kind of keep in touch through Mark, but he hasn't been in my neck of the woods lately.

Was there not some plan to reform the first version of the ISB - Archie Fisher was trying to do it?

I never heard that - I must have been shaded from it!

I heard you agreed, Clive agreed, and Robin didn't (this was circa 87/88).

No! It's much more complicated than that. But he (Robin) is unbending a bit - there was a project that we were going to do, but it fell through - and he kind of accepted it before I did so you never know, the barriers are falling slightly, perhaps.

How did you get to meet the other guys in the acoustic band?

Well it was just let's form a little band - not too much effort; no screaming and yelling, and make the songs kind of speak for themselves and interpret them more. I thought it would be good to use a percussionist so I asked Frank (who was in Fish's band at that time so I couldn't get him) but he got Dave, and I knew Stuart from the previous band, and Stuart knew John and recommended him so it came organically.

Do you all live locally?

Within thirty-odd miles; Dave is at Humber, John lives at Dunbar. We usually meet at Humber for practices.

The tape ends with small talk about Peebles and Innerleithen, of no interest to anyone else. Mike lived in Sydney Terrace, Craighentony when he was young, if that is of any interest. Near Portobello. Not the poorest part of Auld Reekie!

"As far as I am concerned Robin came from Mars" *Bruce Findlay interviewed by Norman Lamont*

If you were au fait with anything in Scotland in the late 60s early 70s you bought your records from Bruce's in Rose Street. There you'd get the String Band gossip, previews and get your records in a shop staffed by music fans - probably the first of the rock generation, in Scotland at least. You'd go home with your String Band album in a red "I found it at Bruce's" bag. Bruce Findlay went on to manage Simple Minds and the Silencers, among other adventures, but he never misses a chance to evangelise about his biggest heroes, the Incredible String Band, Bob Dylan and John Lennon. We talked for a few hours, ranging from the 60s to Oasis. His grasshopper mind makes a Williamson song look as logical as a computer program, so this is very much my sifted version of what he said.

We started by talking about the ISB's first demo.

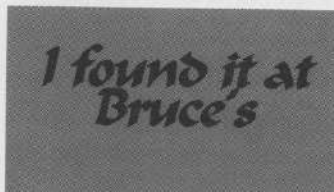
Mike played with a rock group, and in his spare time during the Festival would sing Ode To Bob Dylan. He would do his own acoustic, folkly stuff at Hendersons (an Edinburgh vegetarian restaurant, still there today). We became friends and used to hang out together at the Place, a sort of beat club. I never saw Mike as a folknik - Robin and Clive, of course were, and were very young. The interesting thing about folk in that period is that it was extraordinarily hip. It was as hip to be into Woody Guthrie in 1963-4 as to be into Pearl Jam or Oasis in 94. And so lots of young people were into the folk revival - OK, fingers in the ear stuff, but good. Young people would respect the older musicians and older tunes. Just before that, in the 50s, was like now, where they didn't give a shit. But when things become hip, people take notice. So you had the beat boom - the first Britpop scene in the early 60s - coinciding with a folk revival.

Mike Heron was in a pretty cool rock group - he was the lead singer. I had a record stall in a mad coffee bar in Lothian Road called Mr Smith's. This was 1965, and I was selling soul imports, but I also loved blues and folk music - I preferred the lyrics of folk singers but the music of pop or soul people, so I liked it when people like Bob Dylan began to blend the two and become hip.

And Robin and Mike too - to me the ISB were the hippest band of all time - the perfect combination: young and beautiful, hip and like street kids as well. Neither of them were poverty-stricken youngsters, but they weren't rich either - they were just Edinburgh kids, but they hung around in Bohemia, you know, lots of artists, and Edinburgh being that kind of city, it was a

great place for that sort of thing to emerge. I don't think that's often recognised, because Edinburgh's a place you bring the arts to - it doesn't usually produce art. That's wrong. Clive's Incredible Folk Club was in Glasgow, and it wasn't obvious they came from Edinburgh. As far as I was concerned Robin came from Mars - he was a space cadet, with this weird, lovely accent - so it didn't matter where they came from, but they came from Edinburgh and I knew them, so I loved it. It pleases Glaswegians to take credit - the String Band did start in Glasgow, but they're an Edinburgh band - there's no argument about it!

They also made their first demo in Edinburgh in Alan Coventry's house. Alan Coventry was a schoolmate of Mike's and he played bass with the Boston Dexters. Mike invited me up - I knew him and Alan because of selling records and generally knowing people in groups. Alan was a very funny guy who had a Revox tape recorder, so they went in there and made their first set of demos. A few weeks later Mike came



back to the stall and I asked how it was going. He said great, they had serious interest from two record companies - Transatlantic and Elektra. I said it had to be Elektra - they were cutting edge - but I was teaching them to suck eggs. They already knew. To absolutely honest, I can't remember what was on that demo. I was probably out my face! I just remember being excited at being there. I think maybe Maybe Someday was on it. I don't know what happened to the tape - of course they didn't have a cassette machine to do copies on!

How do you think Mike viewed Robin in those days? Did he see him as extraordinary too?

I really don't know, because to me they're like the Gallagher brothers in Oasis, or Lennon and McCartney. Who'll ever really know? It's a good question, because only Lennon and McCartney have that richness of talent, and quite diverse. They were both space cadets, in fact - what about Mike's fixed grin - unbelievable. It's funny that Robin looks now like he looked then, with the little goatee beard. He'd cultivated the kind of folkie 'old man' look. I think Mike did wonders for Robin. It wasn't till the String Band that he discarded the beard

and put on the robes, and then he looked beautiful, he looked like God. He looked as beautiful as David Bowie was in Ziggy, without the obvious artifice. He looked natural, like he came from the hills, like he came from Tibet. He'd walk on stage and people just went AAAH! It was contrived as anything else, the way we all looked, but there was an attempt to look uncontrived.

It's hard to imagine there would have been a String Band without Robin, but would there have been a String Band without Mike?

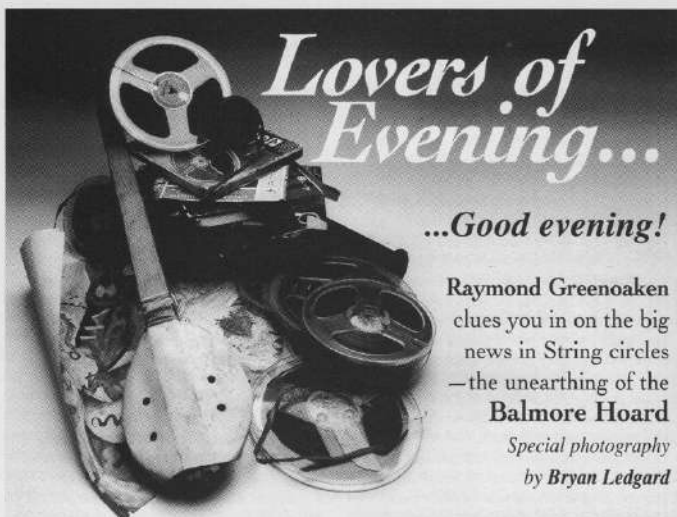
Well again it's like Lennon and McCartney, only the String Band were better than the Beatles. Comparisons are not fair. So I'd say Lennon is a bit like Robin and McCartney is a bit like Mike, but Mike still has a bit of Lennon in him as well, that McCartney doesn't have. He's much sweeter than Mike. Mike could write quite nice, commercial, focused songs, more acceptable to more people, but he could rock out too. He has some pair of lungs in him. But one of my favourite Mike songs is Air, which is very short, gentle and sexy, and it could have been written by Robin, except Robin wouldn't have made it so commercial - he'd have wandered off for ten minutes. So it's like Lennon and McCartney - Yin and Yang - you couldn't have had it without one or the other. Just Robin and Mike - you could still have the String Band without Malcolm or Likky or any of the rest of them.

It was a magic time, when we had Wilson and Benn and the promise of the future, with the String Band and the folk revival and all the wonder of the past. Until it all went wrong.

What went wrong?

I don't know. I think Scientology had an effect on them, but I wouldn't blame Scientology as one thing. It could have been anything - it could have been a heavyweight lawyer, it could have been a friend - but ultimately outside influences affected them. The String Band were part of a messy kind of family - the band, Joe Boyd, Elektra, the fans, the record shops that sold their records, the promoters - and when the corporate thing came in and they switched labels, some of the fun seemed to... I think they stopped believing in their own magic in a way. I lost touch around that time. Scientology didn't interest me at all. I was a camp follower, always down at Innerleithen, but the atmosphere had changed. I wouldn't knock them for it. Also the authorities were against it, which added to its allure. Robin and Mike to me were always positive anyway, they didn't need Scientology to tell them that.....

(Continued in Issue 10)



In the period between Robin's return from Morocco in late 1966 and the move to Penwern in early '68, he and Licorice spent much of their time at Temple Cottage, Balmore, a few miles north of Glasgow on the A807. The owner of the cottage was Mary Stewart, a veterinarian and intrepid mountain climber who lived there with her five children and kept open house to a constant cavalcade of mountaineers and itinerant musicians. Now in her seventies but reportedly as spry as ever, Mary still lives at Temple Cottage and remembers that time with fondness.

During recent renovations at the farmhouse, a number of unexpected items came to light, in particular a boxful of battered 1/2 inch reel-to-reel tapes, consigned to a dark cupboard decades ago. Some were untitled; others bore the names of some of the wandering musos that had passed through the household in the later '60s; and a few were labelled with the names—be still, my beating heart!—of "Robin", "Mike", and even "Robin and Mike".

Were these dusty reels unique and hitherto unknown ISB recordings? Lacking a suitable tape machine on which to give 'em a spin, Mary eventually passed the whole cache to a friend, David Clark, whom she knew to be a devotee of all things String. With them came two additional items, also discovered during the upheaval, in the room once occupied by Robin and Likky: a home-made two-string fiddle and an unfinished watercolour. Together, these articles form what we have come, with appropriate gravitas, to call the Balmore Hoard.

The first I heard about this trove was when David contacted me, back in the summer. Although I hadn't met him at the time, I recognised his name from the *beGLAD* subscribers list; and his own opulent pile is within strolling distance of Be Glad Towers, in sun-kissed Sheffield. Since David, like Mary, had no access to reel-to-reel equipment, he kindly delivered the tapes into my keeping. (I'd invested in a 4-track Teac reel-to-reel recorder a few years back for home recording purposes.) And so it happened that your breathless scribe

became the first person in thirty years to bend an ear to these extraordinary recordings. Readers, I felt like Howard Carter in the tomb of Tutankhamun...

There were complications, however. Almost all the tapes had been recorded at half-speed, whereas my machine had only normal and double-speed settings. I cracked the problem by copying them onto a cassette player, then copying them *back* onto a new reel with the setting at double-speed. Played back at normal, the recordings could then be heard at their original speed. (You may find that explanation perfectly opaque; trust me—it works.)

Inevitably, the question trembling on every reader's lips is: how much of the tapes' contents features our heroes? Less than a tenth, as it happens—but that still amounts to about 4½ hours. Just let that sink in for a moment... 4½ hours of never-before-heard '66-'67 vintage String Bandery is the equivalent of 7 old-fashioned vinyl LPs; nearly as many recording minutes, in fact, as you'll get in the much-trumpeted Beatles Anthology CD set. Sadly, there's a catch: it's unlikely you'll hear any of it.

For one thing, the recording quality is pretty rough. The recordings were evidently made on a lo-fi domestic tape recorder with a single microphone. The tape itself is in fairly fragile condition, and is over thirty years old. Tape hiss and machine hum are frequently present to a distracting degree. In other words, these tapes make the average '70s bootleg sound like a miracle of acoustic technology. It's also debatable whether Robin or Mike would countenance the release of any of the contents. They are, after all, private recordings intended solely for the ears of their own close circle.

Notwithstanding all this, the Balmore ISB Tapes are of enormous interest to the serious student of String. They fall roughly into three categories: rehearsal sessions, in which Robin and Mike, alone or together, give brand-new arrangements a tentative shake; casual music-making, in which the lads jam with other

musicians passing through the cottage, or bang out selections from their individual repertoires just for the sport of it; and recordings where the tape is left running while they chat, play with the kids or act the goat. All of this is illuminating, in the vivid insights it offers of life *chez* Stewart in those formative times.

The rehearsal tapes in particular are compulsive listening. We hear songs like *The Mad Hatter's Song*, *The Eyes Of Fate* and *The Half-Remarkable Question* in the very process of formation, often with different words, different chord progressions and different melodic turns. We hear songs we've never heard before. And we get an intimate sense of the personal dynamics between Robin and Mike (and also Likky) in the banter and discussion between the songs. If nothing else, it nails the old canard that they never practiced!

Internal evidence suggests that the ISB-related recordings were made in the months between October '66 and February '67. They're almost certainly earlier than the Sound Techniques recordings, and so represent the earliest unreleased material that has yet come to light. On one session, Mike and Robin are evidently assembling their set for the prestigious Albert Hall concert in November '66. Apart from the songs, which include *When The Music Starts To Play*, *Chinese White* (here referred to as "Gimbri Song"), *No Sleep Blues* and *Relax Your Mind* (an old jug band number), we hear them practicing their introductions to each selection. Anyone who ever played in a band will find such earnestness amusingly familiar...

This, of course, is serious anorak territory, and we wouldn't be doing our job properly if we didn't give you a full and detailed commentary on all the individual components of the Balmore Hoard.



The Watercolour

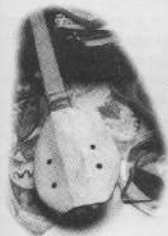
This engaging unfinished composition probably dates from 1967. It's one of the few examples of Robin's artwork—he's confirmed that it's his—to survive from that period. The similarities in style and composition to the watercolour on the *Changing Horses* inner sleeve are striking. It's a promiscuous mélange of geometrical motifs, animal and humanoid figures and washes of colour. A ladder reaches from the foot of the frame to an unpainted space tenanted only by a red and orange luminary with a benign expression. Below this space is a partial view of a green globe with upstaring eyes and the legend "THE FAMOUS ROLLING EARTH".

Roughly in the centre of the composition is a blue, heart-shaped face with pouting lips, next to which is written the word "certainly". In the top left hand corner is another luminary, evidently representing the Moon. Floating beneath it is a large pink question mark. The other figures

include a large fish, a smaller fish pursued by a bird, a cow with indignant expression and cornucopia-style horns, a beetle, a snake, a disembodied head that seems to prefigure Daavid Allen's pot-head pixies, a dog and two humans. These human figures are the focus of the composition. They may represent Adam and Eve—the serpent lurks nearby—but Robin has hinted that they're portraits of Likky and himself.

The male figure, in pale yellow, has a short blond beard and page-boy coif. The female is rendered in green with blue and black hair. Each reaches out to touch what could be an oyster shell, but might equally well be a sticky bun. A later hand had emphasised the female's breasts in sharp pencil lines, and another hand had primly endowed her with a bikini in thicker pencil; the same hand had also taken the pencil to the male's immodestly dangling genitalia. In the true spirit of '60s candour, I've applied a putty rubber to these pencil strokes, to reveal the offensive details that lie beneath. (The accompanying photo should only be viewed in the company of a police officer or a qualified GP.)

Like Robin's songs, the painting bears any number of interpretations. As a tableau of *ur*-humans surrounded by beasts, it would have made a suitable illustration for *Creation*. Incidentally, the "famous rolling earth" caption reappeared in a scene deleted from the *Be Glad* film, featuring Joe Boyd as Atlas in a leopard skin—see issue 5. And might "certainly" allude somehow to the opening line of *Witches Hat*? Painting and song may well have been coeval.



The Fiddle

Robin admitted last issue to an enthusiasm for making rudimentary instruments. This example of his craft is a long-necked, small-bodied folk fiddle a little longer than the gimbri, with a carved headstock decorated with coloured paints and green thread, with tuning pegs for two strings. The body is made from a large marine shell, with a soundboard of what might be goatskin. "I had a hell of a time gluing it to the shell," Robin



Is this the same man?



Detail from the watercolour

recalls. A couple of rusty nails join shell and wooden neck together at the base. The bridge has not survived. As there is no nut at the top of the neck, it's likely the strings would have been fretted by holding the fingernail against them, in the fashion of the Yugoslavian Gusla. Was it ever played? "Probably," says Robin, "but I don't think it sounded very good. Most of my DIY instruments didn't!"



The Tapes

There's a vast diversity of stuff on the surviving 13 reels. Most of it was taped at half-speed, which means you can get twice as much onto a reel, but with a measurable loss in sound quality. A fair bit is taped from vinyl sources of a mostly folkish flavour—Bert Jansch, Dave Van Ronk, Shirley Collins, Pete Seeger, The Corries and others; but there's also the full *Revolver* album, plus orchestral, cool jazz and organ music. This may reflect the collective tastes of the Balmore residents, but some at least is likely to have been taped by Robin.

Wizz Jones and Pete Stanley were working as a bluegrass duo at this time, and seem to have been regular visitors to the cottage. Their one and only duo album is here, but there are also tapes of them playing live into the tape recorder, and leading the Stewart clan in an exuberant singalong. Most of this, in fact, repays repeated listening. Several cheerful Americans also conduct singalong sessions with the kids (yes, you made your own amusement then...); these are quite charming, but much less musically than Wizz 'n' Pete. On one tape, recorded in real time, a male singer cranks out standards like *Georgia* and *Unchained Melody* to a jazzy guitar accompaniment. This is followed by someone—

could it be Robin?—performing rambling extemporisations on a harmonium. There's also a goodly measure of the Stewart siblings at play, and a cute sequence in which Robin tries to entertain his namesake Robbie, at two years old the youngest of the clan. The kids, in fact, are a constant presence throughout the tapes, laughing, yelping, scampering about, occasionally kicking the microphone over. More than once, Mary can be heard saying: "Robbie, will you please be quiet now?" with no apparent effect. From time to time, snatches of radio broadcasts crackle out, which help to date the proceedings. These include a couple of sequences from *I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again*, which some of our British readers may fondly recall (your reporter was more of a *Round The Horne* man himself).

And so to the material that should most concern our perverid readership. The recordings involving Robin, Mike and Likky break down into five main "sessions". It's hard to tell what order they were recorded in: the following sequence is a bit of educated guesswork. For simplicity's sake, we'll refer to them as Sessions (a) to (e).

Session (a), Mike solo, apparently laying down some of his songs at Mary's request (she can be heard interjecting the odd approving comment). We can assume that Mike was a fairly frequent visitor to the cottage. This session is preceded by Jimi Hendrix banging out *Hey Joe* on the wireless, which probably dates the session to Jan/Feb 1967. The titles of the unknown songs are of course guesses of my own.

Short Song/tune/Are You Ready?/Can't Keep Me Here/Let Me Tell You/tune/When The Music Starts To Play/Running Around All Night

Short Song is a brief burst of what may be a longer song. It has a similar swing to the "Caribbean" sections of *Queen Juanita*. *Tune* is little more than a short chord sequence. *Are You Ready?* sounds like a bit of a novelty number, with what Mike announces as "a short break for horror—a horror interval". It also features a



In a Sheffield garden

bridge figure on guitar that reappeared as part of *The Pig Went Tiddling Over The Hill* on the June '68 Fillmore West tape. A series of apparently random chords drifts into *Can't Keep Me Here*, easily recognisable. *Let Me Tell You* is a fluffy, extravagant ditty punctuated with slaps on the soundboard, followed by a languorous, raggy sort of guitar tune, somewhat reminiscent of Michael Hurley, which then segues into *When The Music Starts To Play*. Mike abandons this after the first chorus, protesting: "I don't know about you, but I'm really knocking myself out here!" Gamely, he embarks on another hitherto unknown song, but this is obliterated after a few seconds by a subsequent recording—some earnest strummers trolling out *Mr Tambourine Man*.

These four Heron originals, if that is what they are, are pretty much in the same upbeat jug band/Caribbean groove as *How Happy I Am* and *Everything's Fine Right Now*. There's nothing momentous here, and they would certainly have sounded more at home on the first album than on *5000 Spirits*. It's clear that there was more memorable material on the way, but these songs have an amiable, lightweight charm; and if Mike was knocking himself out, he nevertheless sounds fairly relaxed throughout.

Session (b). Robin solo, with occasional interpolations from Licorice.

See Your Face And Know You/Alice Is A Long Time Gone/tune/Mad Hatter's Song (guitar part)/Mad Hatter's Song/tune/Blues For The Muse/First Girl I Loved/Likky's memoir/Born In Your Town./Born In Your Town (cont)/whistle tune/Born In Your Town /flute tune/Likky's colour song/wacky noises and endeavours, percussion and shriek

A selection of songs familiar to those who have heard the *5000 Spirits* demos, as well as the album itself. The songs here are in various stages of composition: *Born In Your Town* is still in a state of flux, and *The Mad Hatter's Song* only stretches to the end of the blues section. (It opens

with different words, too, along the lines of: "Morning calls dreams of evening/As the clock stirs slower in the sticky black minutes of my new skin". Well, that's what it sounds like! The "sticky black minutes" may be a reference to the Mad Hatter's Tea Party—the March Hare, if you remember, applied butter and tea to his watch to promote its efficient working.) The others share a certain sense of completion, and *Blues For The Muse* even features an extra verse—

I'll let my sorrows fade (x 2)
I will reach for my lady
And she's sure to blow the blues away
It's rain on the ocean (x 2)
Stones on the mountain
And just like I say
I'm just the string striker
I'm just the lamplighter
I ain't no prize fighter
It's easy to play

The whistle tracks sound like two whistles played simultaneously by Robin: short, simple extemporisations. The flute piece could well be a prototype for the final section of *El Wool Suite on U*. It unfolds in a very similar manner, though the melody line bears only a glancing resemblance. The two guitar tunes are short ragtime-styled pieces; the second is little more than a fragment.

Likky's contributions are characteristic. The colour song consists only of the words *blue*, *golden yellow* and *black* floating on fugitive, improvised melodies, and is followed by what sounds like a nursery rhyme (the words are unintelligible). The spoken memoir is a brief prose interlude read by Likky and, I'd guess, composed by her. A sort of dreamy prelude featuring "crushed white ribbons" is linked by the ticking of a clock to a passage in which a certain Frank offers to give the author drum lessons. This anecdote wanders off into a digression concerning bicycles and chimney sweeping. More ticking of the clock and—that's all. Challenging stuff...

The session concludes with the kind of Goonish noises and demented laughter that often surfaced on Bonzo Dog Band albums.

Session (c). Robin and Likky/Robin and Mike

Bleeker Street Blues/As I Walked Out On A May Morning/First Girl I Loved/Every Time I See Your Face/Gimbri Song (Chinese White) /intro and Gimbri Song/Alice Is A Long Time Gone/Everything's Fine Right Now/intro and When The Music Starts To Play/discussion /Lovers Of Evening.../Relax Your Mind/ discussion/No Sleep Blues/The Half-Remarkable Question

These seem to be two separate sessions, apparently juxtaposed by chance. The first features Robin and Likky running casually through a few traditional songs, with Robin dropping in *First Girl I Loved*, a song that was evidently much on his mind at the time. *Bleeker Street Blues* (my guess at the title) is a real treat, the sort of song Lou Reed would probably have written if he'd been playing in a '30s jug band; and the unassuming performance is a delight.

The second segment is arguably the most interesting String-related recording in the Hoard. Remarkably, it seems to be the lads, occasionally

abetted by Likky, planning their set for the Albert Hall concert they were to share with Elektra label-mates Judy Collins and Tom Paxton in November 1966. There's lots of badinage and discussion between the songs, much of it hard to make out, but one can clearly hear Robin and Mike trying out their carefully-scripted introductions to individual songs.

These often take the form of little rhymes. Thus, Mike: "No place for what the cautious say/When the music starts to play". And, prefixing *Chinese White*—here referred to simply as "Gimbri Song"—is this peculiar piece of doggerel, recited by Mike and Robin together: "This magic mountain is going to grow a fountain with a song/This is the song he shortly will have sung..." (Imagine the italicised words rendered in singsong stage-Chinese accents.)

Robin, it transpires, had prepared an introduction to the entire set. "Lovers of evening—good evening. My name is Robin Williamson and this is Mike Heron. We're songwriters and players, and prophets from the North, and also seers extraordinary by appointment to the wonder of the Universe." Modest to a fault... In the course of repeated run-throughs, this changes briefly into "lovers of good evening", amid cackles of mirth.

There's also much deliberation over the running order, which Robin itemises as: *Relax Your Mind*, *When The Music Starts To Play*, *October Song*, *Everything's Fine Right Now*, *No Sleep Blues*, *Gimbri Song* and (unintelligible). When Likky pipes up to query the order and the allocation of songs between the two prophets from the North, Robin patiently explains the complexities of playing "in very awkward tunings"; and Mike, sounding a little defensive at having bagged one more song than Robin, bleats: "...but the last one [?] is just as much his as mine, and the Gimbri Song is very much a gimbri feature, so it's fairly well kind of balanced." Robin concurs, and Likky appears mollified. "Anyway," says Robin brightly, "we're sure to get an encore..." Reports suggest they didn't! (It seems that their set, for whatever reasons, was truncated to a mere three songs.)

The performances are utterly absorbing. *When*



Wizz Jones and Pete Stanley
"The Wizz and Pete Banjo Show"

The Music and Everything's Fine are pretty close to the album versions, and *Gimbri Song* is *Chinese White* in all but name, but *No Sleep Blues* has a slightly different melody and chord sequence, and features two additional verses, of which the following is a tentative reconstruction (the words are hard to distinguish)—

When you meet a dragon
Don't try to put him in a stew
Just speak to him politely
And he'll see what he will do
When the dragon answered
Well he didn't have too much to say
He just burned down a couple of towns
Said Follow me boys, that's the way
(Likky chuckles off-mike)

The locks mend the locksmith
The Devil's in a lorry going by
.....allegiance
With a wild tremendous cry
Just then I had to leave without him
I felt like going right away
I travelled much faster than the speed
of light
And I got there the previous day

Metaphysical or what?

The final item on this session may well have been recorded on a later occasion: certainly, it isn't mentioned as part of the running order referred to earlier. Unrecognisable from its instrumental intro, it turns out to be a very early version of *The Half-Remarkable Question*, with a different opening verse, a different riff, a different melody line, and a wholly dissimilar feel to the stately *Wee Tam* version a couple of years later.

This is a hectic, headlong, bluesy thrash with Mike's guitar sounding thoroughly un-sitarlike, and a wild, disshevelled vocal from Robin. It's plainly a long way from being well-rehearsed, and bumps to a halt on two occasions, but it absolutely roars with energy and passion. Intriguingly, it features the line "I hear some kind of bird singing in my heart" to a fluttering, descending melody. At this stage, Robin hasn't mastered the tricky rhythm of the line, so Mike obligingly claps it out for him during a break in proceedings, adroitly adding a half-beat to tie it in more closely with the underlying pulse of the song. Here, distilled in a timeless, private moment, is that mysterious quality—that chemistry, if you like—that made Mike and Robin such a formidable and complementary team. Rivalry there may have been—jealousy, even, if Joe Boyd is to be believed—but here we can witness just how well they could work together and spark each other off.

Session (d). Robin and Mike/Robin solo/Robin and Mike/Robin and Likky

Relax Your Mind/Fet Off The Floor/ discussion and instrumental jam/*Going To Leave This Country/Down On The Track/More Pretty Girls Than One/One Hundred Forty Three/Gypsy Girl/*autoharp doodles/*wordless song/How Sweet To Be A Cloud/two guitars (1)/two guitars (2)/The Half-Remarkable Question/The Eyes Of Fate/Anach Cuin/Ring-a-doo-a-daddy-o/ Month Of January/The Dreadful Wind And Rain/The*

Cruel Brother/George Collins/Sir Patrick Spens

This again is probably a tessellation of several distinct sessions. The opening sequence finds Robin and Mike ambling through items from their joint repertoire, with Robin surprisingly strumming an autoharp throughout. There are several voices off, suggesting that this was a social occasion.

Fet Off The Floor, evidently a Heron composition, sounds like a first cousin to *Everything's Fine Right Now*; the phrase I've used for the title is practically all I can make out of the lyric. It's followed by an impressively slovenly jam complete with occasional scat vocals. After a solo rendition of *Lover Man*, Mike drops out, leaving Robin to croon a selection of Carter Family and Uncle Dave Macon items to his own autoharp accompaniment. This medley concludes with avant garde doodles on the autoharp, a wordless song of possibly Scottish provenance, and finally *How Sweet To Be A Cloud* from the '50s radio adaptation of Winnie The Pooh—familiar in a slightly modified form as the prelude to *Little Cloud*.

At this point the tape offers up a slice of clarinet-driven modern jazz, then the final chorus of *Penny Lane* on the radio ("I just love that trumpet!" chirps the cheery jock), before returning us to the company of Robin and Mike. It's back to guitar for Robin as the two turn out a brace of short guitar duets. These sound largely improvised; the first includes a couple of phrases that eventually found their way into *Gently Tender*. Bert 'n' John ain't, though it's tuneful enough—but at one point Robin declares "It's a bit bland," to which Mike shrugs, "It is, yeah..."

Robin then runs through *The Eyes Of Fate* alone, and Mike rejoins him for another stab at *The Half-Remarkable Question*. By this time the words are as per the *Wee Tam* version, though without the third verse and with the bird still singing in the author's heart. Mike adds a vocal harmony to the chorus. It's fairly raucous, but

rather more restrained than their earlier attempts on Session (c).

Robin returns to the autoharp for another medley of traditional songs, with Likky chipping in at intervals. This includes *Anach Cuin*, whose tune was later to do memorable service in *The Circle Is Unbroken*, and *The Month Of January*, which Robin reprised in concert in 1971, and again last year for the Calendarium recital. Finally, reaching again for the guitar, he launches into a full-blown (almost 8 minutes) rendition of the briny old Scots ballad *Sir Patrick Spens*. This is a breathtaking performance, showing an extraordinarily mature grasp of traditional ballad idiom for a fluff-chinned whippersnapper just turned 23. Bert Jansch once described the early '60s Williamson as one of the finest young traditional singers in Scotland. Here's the proof.

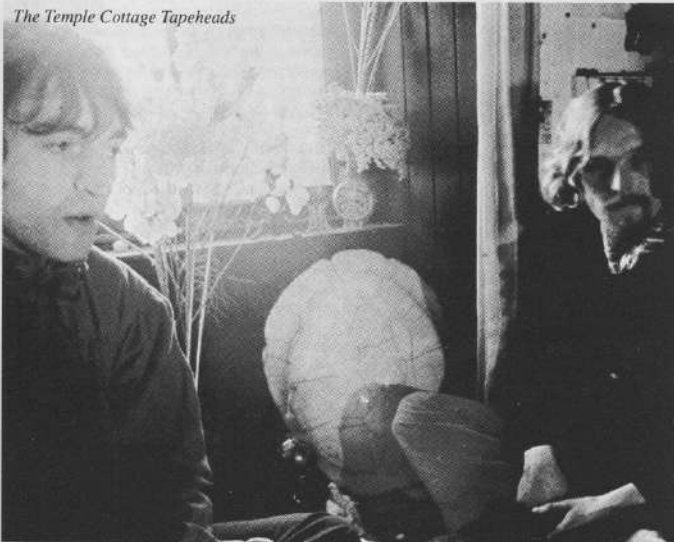
Session (e). Robin and unknown fiddler

The final session is the least interesting. An extremely erratic (and possibly stoned) female American fiddler is heard attempting to essay some fiddle tunes, but is unable to remember any of them beyond the first measure. Robin tries dutifully to accompany her on guitar, then switches to fiddle to saw out some improvised counter melodies. When the fiddles mesh, it sounds quite toothsome, but Robin soon realises the futility of his endeavours. File under Historical Interest Only.

So there you are, Stringfans—history in the headphones. The Balmore Tapes offer an unequalled insight into the everyday lives of our heroes in those high and far-off times: a window into a lost world of incense and nonsense, music-making and making merry, Mad Hatters and tea parties, and the forging of a musical partnership whose legacy still thrills, moves and delights three decades on.

Lovers of evening—good evening!

The Temple Cottage Tapeheads



The batless man on the cover of Myrrh? It's Edward Pope, who has a wealth of tales to tell about the Exploding Galaxy, Stone Monkey and life at Glen Row.

Just a few notes about the Exploding Galaxy and the String Band connection as I know it, hardly scraping the surface of a subject I could write a book about. The Galaxy was a deliberate creation of Filipino sculptor David Medalla who saw it as a development of his "biokinetic bubble machines" or foam fountain sculptures. Just as the suds were free to be themselves and take on any form, this would be a dance company on the same lines. Most of the participants came together through the UFO club, Friday all-nighters in 1967 in Tottenham Court Road. The first public performance was at Alexandra Palace in April 1967 at the "14-hour Technicolour Dream": we did a short "ballet" called "Fuzzdeath" in which I reluctantly played the Archbishop and Malcolm Le Maistre played the Fuzz King. (Fuzz, in case you've forgotten, meant the police.)

Soon the Galaxy became a free-form commune at Medalla's electricity-free house at 99 Balls Pond Road, (previously famous for its steam radio). There were official performances at UFO club and other similar venues, and unofficial ones in streets, parks and buses. Once we were all arrested for dancing in the streets. We performed further afield at Warwick, Southampton, Paris, Amsterdam and Utrecht. More than just a



dance company, we began to turn the everyday objects and actions of our lives into artistic metaphors. Indian art in particular had a major influence on our creative style. LSD and free love played their part, but not to excess, and drugs were banned at the communal house. Nevertheless the "fuzz" came and planted us with cannabis anyway, soon after a scurrilous article about us appeared in the People. We had a few brick attacks from locals. These attacks began to break us up, plus a natural tendency to Explode, and the last straw came when a Paris millionairess started giving Galaxy members money and they all went off to India, round about 1969.

Some notable Exploders who didn't have a String Band connection were "Fitz" (Gerry Fitzgerald), famous for density paintings, incongruous costumes and quaquaversal script, who invented kinetic theatre and

transmedia (unlike multi-media, which seeks to stimulate more than one sense, transmedia turns one medium into another, as when you sing a painting or wear a poem as a hat) and Mike Chapman, whose explicit poems with full body language about war and sex were a tour de force. Mike once exposed himself on the David Frost show and now lives in Brazil. Fitz has changed his name several times to avoid capture but one of his specialities is still creating theatre out of junk. In Galaxy days looking for costume and other metaphors in rubbish piles was known as scragging. There were plenty of female exploders too but their art tended to be more subtle and less dramatic.

Apart from the String Band, the Galaxy also made connections with musicians Arthur Brown (the King of Hell Fire), Alexis Korner (King of British Blues), and Brazilian superstars Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso. The ISB connection was made in New York after Malcolm and Rakis had quit the Galaxy in Amsterdam, probably as a result of my interminable philosophising at pow-wows. Other Exploders John, Malenie and Uiscebo joined them along with Peter O'Connor, old school chum of Malc and Rakis, to form Stone Monkey and dance with the String Band. Less well known is their own little song-play performed at the Edinburgh festival in 1970, "Dobson D. de Bray", with classics like "Light that joined the Lover" and "And if the Slayer" by Malcolm, and Peter's "She Smiled Completely".

I first met Robin Williamson in Putney in 1969. That evening Rose returned from the States and all met up at Malcolm's father's place. Never before or since have I seen so much love and joy flowing among a bunch of people in the hugs of reunion. With so much excitement what else was there for it but to do the famous Scientology exercise, TR zero, which enables you to "be there" unreservedly facing another person with no need to hide behind doing anything else. I didn't know the theory then but I found myself gazing for twenty minutes deep into the eyes of a warm and beautiful woman whom I never saw before or since. That kind of got me interested in Scientology, though it was two more years before I got involved. Two more years later I got out again, though pleased with the experience.

In the meantime I was living on a small inherited sum, and checking out spiritual places like Glastonbury, Samye-Ling and Findhorn. My first night at Glen Row I was seduced by Licorice, which remains the high point of my mostly humdrum life even though I was passed over for another the next day, no more than I deserved for weeping in her bed. I asked her what Scientology was, and she asked me "Do you know you are a spirit?" (I thought so). My only other insight into the sex life of the String Band, apart

from gossip of which there was plenty, about past lives as well as sex, was when I'd been living at Glen Row some time, and Robin and Malcolm invited round bachelors Peter and me to lecture us on the perils of masturbation. Most of the time I hung out with the Stone Monkey guys as the String

Band were inclined to be very busy, grinning breezily past you down the path. Janet Shankman, Robin's first wife, as well as a brilliant artist, was a ferocious Scientologist scaring away groupies and sniffing out secret dope smokers, but boys will be boys and the lads still went tickling the laird's salmon with the local poachers.

Once the band had decided to stop performing with Stone Monkey, the periphery were often strapped for cash, and some of my inheritance vanished in

loans to them. Malenie got to be the fan club person, Malcolm eventually got to be part of the band, John became a wood-turner and brought up a family with Ishy (Uiscebo), and I took up making sand-candles when my money ran out, but soon started working for Scientology in Edinburgh. There's a rather unfortunate idea in Scientology that people who don't benefit from it must be connected to a "suppressive person" and the remedy is to disconnect from them. One pleasant friend of mine was turfed out of Glen Row because of being labelled an "SP", and there was a further unpleasant business of the same some years later when Malenie died of cancer, her last boyfriend got the same label. (Robin's song Fare Thee Well, Sweet Mally is a true and beautiful tribute to her). Still later lots of Scientologists, including Mike and Malcolm, left the fold, though probably not before it had taken quite a toll on their personal lives. I would nevertheless endorse the conclusion of the writer in *beGLAD 7* who suggested Scientology is well worth studying and recommended that those interested contact one of the independent groups and not the Church of Scientology itself. (*A useful contact is the magazine "Ivy" at Box 78, DK 2800, Lyngby, Denmark*)

Some of my pleasantest memories of Glen Row were the communal Christmases, when breakfast was champagne and lychees followed by present opening with about twenty people all having given each other presents, then all went off to do their bit for the meal. Another memorable event was the transvestite party, where Mike was the plaster-caster groupie but John Gilston stole the show. My chief claim to fame in it all was to be the only person on the cover of Myrrh without a hat (because I had slept too late to find one) - years later I was recognised as that by a stranger. As Robin said in his song on that album which he wrote for the Glen Row people (as well as all of you) "I see us all get home" It's still possible.

Illustrations: Madalla & Galaxy in Hyde Park and Malcolm & friends at the Electric Garden (News of the World, 6.8.67!)



INTO THE EMBERS

Bob Nutbein does a lit crit job on DARLING BELLE

The lyrical structure of this song is essentially dramatic, consisting of a series of internal monologues in the first person, thus conveying a confessional sense of intimacy. Cleverly interleaved with this is the Keep The Home Fires Burning sequence, invoking the wartime milieu, and a final third person narrative stanza, acting as a coda, which neatly rounds off the song.

The song incorporates elements of the poetical format popularised by Robert Browning, known as the "Dramatic Monologue", wherein imaginary characters reveal their inner thoughts in a first person narrational mode. Darling Belle may be viewed more precisely as a kind of dramatic duologue, as the two primary protagonists, Belle and James, each have "in-character" speaking parts.

The opening section is also reminiscent of "A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man" in that it employs the Joycean device wherein the speaker (or, as here, the singer), in taking the character of the story's heroine, uses an appropriately simplistic vocabulary and childish diction:

Papa would take me to the park to see the swans...

...the simple choice of the word "papa" instead of daddy is a hint of social and period colouring reinforced by the song's title. Both "Belle" and "papa" are slightly quaint, old-fashioned nomenclature. "Darling Belle" suggesting also that our heroine is a child of privilege—highborn, well bred and born into a degree of affluence. Belle certainly seems cherished, if not pampered, little darling.

The opening at once creates a charming picture of childish innocence and wonderment:

By hansom cab trotting so high



The detail of the hansom cab establishes the song's period time-setting, and Belle's well-to-do background—she and her father don't have to walk to the park.

Belle as a tiny girl feels proud and excited to be so high up from the ground—reinforcing her smallness of stature—and enjoys the trotting of the horse ride:

Holding his hand to see the swans

The reiteration of the phrase "to see the swans" twice within the space of three lines

reveals to us that, for this little girl, the swans form the real highlight of this memory.

(See the white bird/On the water...)

"Would take me" is a phrase implying some degree of paternalistic indulgence (ie. this was not an isolated visit), as well as, by its past tense, setting the tone of retrospection and reminiscence which characterises the whole song—fragments of memories juxtaposed within a sophisticated yet naturalistic framework.

Hissing louder than rustling dresses of gracious ladies bustling by

To a small child who doesn't really understand the adult world, life can seem like a bustling hurly-burly. Belle enjoys the high vantage of the cab, but holding her father's hand emphasises her smallness and vulnerability.

Notice the dynamics of this opening verse—the string of onomatopoeic action verbs employed: take—trotting—hissing—rustling—bustling. From Belle's diminutive viewpoint, the world seems to be a noisy, interesting yet formidable place. Might, the setting be London's Hyde Park? Do swans hiss? Do they hiss loudly? Do they hiss at Belle? She nevertheless finds them interesting and attractive.

The ladies bustling by in their long period dresses seem very highborn and aristocratic, and although "gracious" they are too engaged in their own concerns to pay much attention to the little girl. This small detail is to find a more poignant resonance in the final verse, where Belle is aged and once more finds herself overlooked and neglected by others. It is also mirrored in James—likewise diminutive and (literally) overlooked by the busy adult world, burrowing under old ladies' knees.

The alliteration and assonance (Hansom—holding his hand—hissing), together with the internal rhymes, convey a sense of vivacity and energy.

See swan ships come sailing in...



The alliterative sibilant sounds here confer an impressionistic sense of the softness, sleekness and elegance of the swans, and their apparently effortless, gliding progress. The swans seem proud, stable and majestic as sailing ships. Their whiteness represents the purity and innocence of childhood. Our imaginary camera now pans from the whiteness of the swans upwards and

outwards to the whiteness of the passing clouds:

White as the clouds on a windy day

The wind moves the swans and the clouds as wind would move sailing ships.

Now Belle's thoughts drift to her childhood sweetheart:

James I suppose would be in school...

This line, sung (slightly inappropriately) by Malcolm and immediately repeated, marks a transition in the song. We deduce that James is slightly older than Belle, who still enjoys pre-school leisure for park visits. Now the measured strumming of the acoustic guitar, with an inventive bass-line bubbling beneath, makes the music more muscular and masculine. An organ undercurrent is subsequently added, as James'/Robin's voice now eagerly takes up the story:

I was I was learning to spell

— Laughing at loud smells

and the last word, being so cheekily stretched, perhaps itself mimics the farting sound.

"Loud smells" is a euphemistic phrase in which Robin adroitly "devastates our synaesthesia". Thus James immediately characterises himself as an exuberant, playful and mischievous child in the setting of a prim and fairly authoritarian Victorian school:

Avoiding the rod of the codfaced master



Blunt internal rhymes divulge the games of mutual enmity between schoolboy and pedagogue. The marvellous epithet "codfaced" conveys unsimiling, steady-eyed, mirthless vigilance.

Was it your absence made me quiet at noon?

James, in his busy and strictly ordered day, also finds time to think fondly of Belle, missing her companionship—which suggests that they have not long been separated.

Playing British Bulldogs on the gravel...

This—if you didn't know—is an ebullient childhood game in which a wave of boisterous boys make repeated charges from safe base to safe base (usually from wall to wall across a playground), attempting to avoid being tagged by an adversary in the middle ground. With each successive charge the bulldogs' number diminishes as runners caught then join the catcher, the last surviving bulldog being deemed the winner.

A neat verbal antithesis now follows:

Was it your presence coloured my dream?

Just as Belle's absence makes James sadly quiescent, her presence enriches his imagination.

From the slow, fragile delicacy of the opening with..... (page 38)

wistful glockenspiel and flute, the music now gets into a stridently rhythmical phase: *I burrowed in cupboards like a mole all saturday...*



Belle's little girl status was underlined earlier; James' smallness is illustrated in terms of size and height as he crawls burrowing like a mole:

Under old chairs and old ladies' knees
The repetition of "old" emphasises childhood's subservience to an established and venerable social order.

I framed your half-remembered face
With frail white embroideries...
These two lines operate on both a literal and metaphorical level—although the feminine embroideries might more appropriately pertain to Belle rather than James (perhaps they represent a childish gift?). To decorate a photograph of her with lace shows James' fond and romantic nature, or—if the embroideries are mental—means that he fills gaps in his memory imaginatively. Within the song's context, time is moving remorselessly on—already having half-stolen Belle's face from his memory. The whiteness of the embroideries again symbolically underlines childhood's purity and innocence, like the swans and the clouds. Embroideries are beautiful products of attentiveness and care—but also frail as memories.

Calling to you down the mousey garden
Calling to you down the mousey garden
Note how the syllables of "garden" are emotively elongated: this conjures further images of childhood play. "Mousey" is an unusual yet apt epithet to apply to a garden, effective in showing it as an interesting and exciting place for children to play. "Mousey" has undertones of seclusion and perhaps also of shyness (Belle is a thin girl with cold hands—perhaps lacking in self-confidence). The repetition of "calling to you" indicates a yearning—a spiritual stretching and reaching out which is the true synthesis of the song as a whole. The heartfelt elongation of the syllables meaningfully reinforces this prehensile sensibility.

It is noteworthy how Robin, Mike and Malcolm, by sharing the vocals, reinforce different time-phases in the skilfully conjoined sectionality of the song.

O did you meet him at the ball...?
Malcolm's line here reflects a subtle shift in the narrational stance, being addressed to Belle, the third person "him" referring of course to James. The childhood sweethearts are evidently separated and lose touch.
... *Eighteen years on*

We have now moved into adulthood, and learn that James is a tall soldier now, and Belle full grown, eligible and nubile, meeting James at a ball—a formally structured social engagement. The insistence of the repetition ("Belle did you meet him...") makes the last line of this segment ring as though echoing in Belle's subconscious years later.

O do you remember me?
The music now shifts back to the slow, wistful delicacy of the opening, with exquisite, reflective glockenspiel, as the reunited pair reminisce:

Thin girl, with cold hands...
Belle displays a charming modesty and vulnerability, surprised and delighted that he still remembers their sweet bond.

You in our scarlet, and you knew my name

The past tense "knew" takes us further into the future, as Belle is here reflecting upon this reunion from a future vantage. Robin plays cleverly with tenses, and effectively conjures a mood of romantic intimacy:

Step to the veranda
Under the wisteria
In mysterious November

Diction such as "veranda" and "wisteria" maintains the grandiose period milieu, as the sweethearts move away from the social swirl of the ball to be alone together.

"Mysterious November" I have always considered to be a marvellously evocative phrase, conferring images of autumn mistiness, and the highly poetical polysyllabic internal rhyming is impressive.

Dancing as if with death or fate
carries a sinister echo of the medieval "danse macabre"—but this is a magical time that reverberates down the years with a vivid intensity. The lovers dance in new-found intimacy, but their future is somehow foreshadowed even in the dance, as if their destinies are predetermined. This is a tremendously potent image, and lends a poignant, tragic stature to their love story.

Dancing ... to the moon black ballroom
Of the silk-skinned lake

This is portentously poetical language—but rightly so, as the episode subsequently becomes one of the most special and treasured of her life.

Our impression of the house and gardens, incidentally, is one of elegance, grandiosity and upper-class privilege. To muted guitar accompaniment the lovers, preferring each other's company to the ball, slip away to the privacy of the nocturnal gardens.

The lake is a ballroom—its shiny, smooth, flat surface is likened in a compact and complex metaphor to a dance floor, its surface, unrippled, seeming like a skin made of silk. Effective alliteration contributes to make this a sententious and memorable line. "Moon black" sounds strange, but the lake is of course dark but for the reflection of the moon.

Now a breathless, hushed intimacy is evoked in the subtle interplay of oboe and guitar:

Kissing me, you lifted my skirt
Under the willow tree

The sudden physical passion and new

depth of their adult relationship is conveyed with great delicacy and a discreet economy. The willow trees provide seclusion and privacy, but the bell-like shape of the willow's overhang also reflects Belle's voluminous skirts. This stanza moves us from the simplicity of Belle as she once was—innocent thin girl with cold hands—into womanhood, through images of great romance, opulence and luxury—veranda, ballroom, silk-skinned lake—back to the couple themselves, caught in an act of secret love and intimacy. Robin's poetical sweep is almost cinematographic. (He has apparently attributed his inspiration for the song's composition to a dream he had, and this is reflected in the fluid, episodic structure.)

There is a suitable pause at the end of the stanza, and this hiatus marks another transition, from love to the intervention of war.

Keep the home fires burning
Though your heart is tearing
Though the boys are far away
They dream of home...

This wartime song (uncredited, incidentally, though this has happily escaped the attention of the Ivor Novello estate) served to maintain morale in much the same way as Vera Lynn's propagandistic anthems during the Second World War. Its interleaving is exceptionally effective as it places Belle's and James' situation in its wider context: they are one of the many couples separated heartbreakingly by the conflict.

Robin, Malcolm and Mike sing together in a music hall style, and banjo and clarinet accompany the singalong with a forcible, stirring jocularity that is eminently apt.

Belle has been left to keep the fire of her love burning whilst James, mobilised, is far away, dreaming of home. The song's insertion is an (ironic) appeal to remain optimistic and to keep spirits high:

There's a silver lining
In the dark clouds shining...

Note how the metaphorically threatening "dark clouds" have now taken the place of the white clouds mentioned earlier in the song.

Turn that lining inside out
Till the boys come home

Unfortunately, the hollow optimism of the "silver lining" is, for Belle and James, to prove ironical and illusory.

A stridently strummed guitar now prefigures the remorseless march of events, as the next stanza represents an imaginary colloquy between the lovers:

O did I see you march to the train
Did I cry, was my nose red?

Belle's self-deprecating humility is part of the charm of her characterisation—ashamed of her tears at their parting, as James takes the train that leads him away to "dance with death or fate". She fears her red-nosed tearfulness may have vitiated the parting image of her he took away with him—the last time he was to see her.

My two-day bride
(Belle and James part as man and wife)
Can you feel me in your memory?

—this could be James' ghost speaking to

Belle...
I will be the redness in your iron fire
 —as Belle keeps the flame of her love alive and the home fire burning, whilst she stares into the embers.

How could I write?—
My words would seem sad or gay
 James' explanation for not writing reveals a dilemma in that to express his heartache at their separation would thereby have increased her sadness; or else, by putting on a show of cheerfulness, he may have deceived her into believing that he was not truly concerned to be apart from her.

In a masterstroke of subtlety and economy, James' death in action is now revealed, or confirmed, to us in five simple words—repeated in an eerie interplay of flat, expressionless monotone voices:

We regret to inform you...
 Belle has received "a little letter full of paper"—the opening phrase being part of the standard official notification that she, like so many others, has become a war widow.

The next, marvellous, segment features glorious vocal harmonies between Robin and Likky, to a piano accompaniment. (This piece still thrills me to the core after 20-odd years of listening.)

Meet me by gaslight in dark dawn...



("gaslight"—note the skilful layering of period details maintained throughout.)

"Dark dawn" is a splendidly alliterative phrase evoking a ghostly atmosphere of desolation and gloom—of Belle wandering sorrowfully in reminiscence. James' death does indeed mark a new dawn for his bereaved bride—but a dawn holding none of the promise or optimism usually associated with the word.

On Waterloo Bridge we will walk arm in arm...

This recalls for me the old black and white film of the same name starring Robert Taylor and Vivienne Leigh, in which it is however the heroine who dies there, believing her husband killed in the war, and Taylor who sorrowfully retraces their steps over the bridge.

The phrase "arm in arm" I



suppose represents the figurative triumph of love over death—Belle's retreat into the past leaving only memories and dreams for comfort and consolation.

Hearing the leaves fall with a whisper
Into the foggy dew

Here is another "mysterious November" where the autumnal atmosphere is one of silence and reverential intensity. (The silence is so overwhelming and claustrophobic that it is possible to hear a leaf falling.) The falling of the leaf is itself symbolic of death and change—the "whisper", as well as being the sound of the leaf, could also be James speaking to Belle in her imagination.

When we are dead...

When we are dead...

Echoed in the sedate, stately solemnity of the churchy organ is a hint that this ghostly rendezvous is a prefiguration of the lovers' only hope of a reunion—in the afterlife.

The last segment of the song is a spoken postscript—reinforcing the tragedy with its aftermath. Belle has clearly remained a widow for the rest of her life—holding her lover's memory sacred, and remaining faithful to it.

Now she sits in her brother's widow's house...

Belle now lodges with her sister-in-law—and what a deliberately offhand description of her circumstances: at twice remove.

The song has taken us all the way from Belle's girlhood to her twilight senescence, where she's left dependent and lonely. Belle resides with another widow—not in any truly social sense, but merely "in her...house". Her sister-in-law by implication is not a particularly willing or friendly hostess—merely tolerating Belle as a matter of duty or familial obligation—and then only on a temporary basis as she is shunted back and forth:

Migrant guest from relative to in-law
 between people with whom she feels no real bond of warmth or friendship.

Skin like a lizard
Aura like a daffodil

The way these two splendid similes are spoken in polyphony creates a kind of hubbub of whispery voices around her, from which Belle remains apart and excluded—echoing her social circumstances—as if she is being spoken about behind her back.

Robin doesn't tell us merely that Belle is now old: the first simile shows her wrinkled

and physically atrophied, couched in an image at once slightly unpleasant and uncomplimentary—as if Belle is being viewed with scarcely concealed distaste and repugnance by her hostess, relatives and in-laws, who, beneath the veneer of social convention which obliges them to provide her with basic hospitality, probably resent and begrudge her as a guest. It is a very sad and poignant picture with which to end.

The phrase "aura like a daffodil" I find particularly haunting—disturbingly evocative. Belle may also resemble a lizard by reason of her immobility:

She sits...

She stares...

Impassive and withdrawn, she yet maintains an aura—her real world being her inner world of memory and retrospection, in which she appears isolated, transfixed, and yet self-contained.

Even if there is little dignity in her social dependence, she nevertheless appears to maintain an inner sense of resignation and calmness, which is the only vestige of dignity to which she has recourse.

Like a daffodil...

—even the yellowness of the daffodil seems apposite: an image of gentleness and fragile delicacy, the yellowness possibly also referring to pallor or jaundiced complexion.

She stares into the embers

And remembers



Her thoughts are enclosed, and she has turned inwards, returning to the past, staring immobile into the redness of the iron fire. The song ends on a resonant, lingering organ chord which perfectly summarises the scene.

With a cyclic neatness, the song encapsulated her life—from the vibrant, vivacious images of childhood life (trotting/hissing/rustling/bustling) to a silent immobility of shrunken introspection. Belle, like the daffodil, has had her brief flowering—cut tragically short, yet still immeasurably precious, to be treasured in the silence of her heart.

Sometimes it seems the only things real
Are what we are and what we feel.

Illustrations by Deena Omar and Steve Small.

HANGMAN'S BEAUTIFUL GRAND-DAUGHTER

Be Glad readers speak out

Over to David Kidman, who's provided a very detailed review of the tape...

I've always had mixed feelings about cover versions; to me, they normally fall into one of three categories:

- i. blatant cash-ins with little or no artistic merit;
- ii. sincere tributes to the original versions, often using a similar arrangement;
- iii. equally sincere tributes, but taking the form of more drastic, often challenging reworkings.

Covers in the last two categories can both be satisfying for the listener, but the very best covers tend to impart something fresh too, whether in the sense of re-evaluation or adding some other extra dimension. They should also stand up to repeated hearings. (Of course, even those in the first category can still be fun to listen to!)

The ISB are a particularly difficult band to cover, as many of their songs are so individual, and the musical settings so unusual, that they almost defy any reworking; often, you just can't imagine their songs being done by anyone else, or in any other way. It's indicative of the quality of this tape, then, that none of the covers fall into the "cash-in" category, virtually all of them seem to represent a genuine tribute that reflects a love and understanding of the original. Only two of the covers fail to do anything much for me; partly, I suspect, because I've never really rated the actual songs themselves..... And the best covers aren't necessarily those that use the best songs. First (and to an extent also subsequent) impressions are that perhaps some of the covers are a bit too close to the originals, too. Oh, and by the way, the actual sound quality of the tape is pretty good, with one or two exceptions (which may or may not be due to mastering difficulties).

So, without further ado, let's go through the tape, taking each song in turn.

October Song (I Looked In):

A fine start, nicely reflecting the spirit of the ISB themselves in the choice of instruments and the arrangement. An almost gospel treatment, while at the same time bringing out the song's more traditional folk character. Lay down, my dear sister, with the good Doctor (Strangely Strange)?

Everything's fine right now (Spitting Feathers):

I've said my hundred words on this, it's only narrowly top of my poll above the next track (aside, I wonder what Kate Green would do with this song?!.....) It just pulls it off because it retains the original's endearingly amateur yet utterly committed feel that's so beguiling, that combination of qualities that (among others) made the ISB themselves so special and distinctive. You can tell there's been a conscious effort at "arrangement", yet it's not over-elaborate or gimmicky, and the quality of the playing imparts an essential freshness and spontaneity. The original had a somewhat gauche, stilted rhythmic feel to it, though attractive in its own way, and I'd never been entirely comfortable with elements of the early Heron vocal style (hints of what I've taken as cod-Caribbean inflection), so I'd always felt the song itself had more potential. Here, Spitting Feathers seem to unlock some of that extra potential, and transcend the original, turning it into a wonderfully happy-all-the-time 3-minute classic, which (in the time-honoured tradition of, say, Just Like Eddie or several by Girls At Our Best), stands up to repeated listenings despite the odd rough edges. And, just as importantly, it doesn't outstay its welcome.

POLL

About 25% of the people who brought the tape wrote in with their votes, perhaps lured by the prize draw. The results are as follows:

Joint First
Joint Third
Fifth
Sixth
Seventh
Eighth
Ninth
Tenth
Eleventh
Joint Twelfth
Thirteenth
Fourteenth
Fifteenth

Banks of Sweet Italy/Pictures in a Mirror
Circle is Unbroken/Painted Chariot
October Song (I Looked In)
Everything's Fine Right Now
Tree
Cold Days of February (Mike Swann)
You Get Brighter
This Moment
Empty Pocket Blues
Turquoise Blue/Cold February (Fez)
Cosmic Boy
Waltz of the New Moon
October Song (Taylor)

VARIOUS ARTISTS The Hangman's Beautiful Grand Daughter Misty Twisty Tapes MTT01

Determinedly to fit tribute to the elves of '60s counter-culture, The Incredible String Band, pulled together by the controlling council of Be Glad fanzine. Never before did I realise that so many people wanted to be Robin Williamson, right down to the scratchy fiddle style!

So, as you've probably guessed by now, Eugene, what's good is those who don't just imitate but interpret the works of Heron and Williamson in their own way. Step forward Spitting Feathers, who with a bouncy, folk-rock rework deliver a chunky *Everything's Fine Right Now*, and Mike Swann who turns *The Cold Days Of February* into neat acapella folk. There are other worthies, naturally, but black marks to those who've seen this as an opportunity to go for broke and exposure.

However, as an exercise in sheer confidence and bravado, this deserves support (nineteen tracks in all), and it's all yours for £8 from Adrian Whittaker, 71a Colvestone Crescent, Dalston, London E8 2U.

Simon Jones

Folk Roots review

Empty pocket blues (Kate Green):

I must confess straight away that Kate's two covers have been familiar to me for some time now, from her tape *An Unkindness of Ravens*, and they have a somewhat unfair advantage in that they enter the arena well-loved and with considerable points already amassed on their behalf! Here, *Empty Pocket Blues* has been transformed, by Kate Green's alchemistic artistry, from a rough diamond into a polished gem of perfection. Yet the bluesy feeling, aching yet smooth, has been retained. Laying it straight on the line, Kate just has a great voice for the blues as well as for folk - strong, steady, controlled - and brings an extra dimension to the song. Raymond's guitar picking is really fine too, jaunty and inspired, Patrick's bottleneck fills and backing vocals provide a perfect foil, and Stefan's Uilleann pipes solo, though totally unexpected, is resourceful and amazingly soulful, to the extent that you almost get to forget the distinctive whistle solo in the original. The test of a great cover again - it's got the spirit of the original without being just a slavish copy, and gives it another dimension too.

Waltz of the new moon (I Looked In):

This is intriguing. On first hearing it sounds like it's rather minimal, too matter-of-fact in its almost mechanical run-through of the words, skipping some of those oh so important pauses and losing some of the structure in the process, but it reveals much more on subsequent hearings. What's lost in instrumental complexity and variety is more than made up for in the vocal arrangement - in this respect, it's the reverse of their *October Song* - and to some extent it even reminds me of *The Mountain of God*. Robin's vocal delivery on the original version, with its ambitious twists and turns, is hard to emulate, but *I Looked In* have turned in a creditable rendition here.

This Moment (Wood Dragon):

This has a lovely spontaneous home-grown goodtime feel. The treatment's quite close to the original, but the arrangement is less sparse, and slightly more country-tinged due to the added instrumental colours (fiddle and harmonica). The lead vocal has slight Williamson-like qualities in its inflection, too. The female vocalist has a glorious combination of fragility and purity, especially in the high notes, a tribute to Likky, and sounding good. There have been some minor changes to the lyrics, omitting some slightly awkward bits (gosh and golly), which is fine by me. There's a "singaround" feel to the finale, the "la la" choruses are a bit shambolic yet fun, and (surprisingly) standing up to repeated listening. This cover retains the charm of the original yet the new arrangement gives it something extra. Like that by *Spitting Feathers*, this cover works so well because it accurately conveys the spirit of the ISB in combining a naive (yet almost amateur) freshness and spontaneity, with a thoughtful, considered and inventive arrangement.

Cold Days of February (Mike Swann):

This rendition starts out emphasising the original version's kinship with traditional folksong, but the doubletracked vocal then brings in a more eerie and unsettling quality, almost of ghosts from the past. The short pennywhistle interlude is spare yet effective, putting the vocal into perspective. All in all, this cover feels like an honest and sensitive response to the original.

Turquoise Blue (Rufus Biggs):

This cover feels very close to the original - though it's rather difficult to imagine the song receiving any radically different treatment. I've always felt the song to be a bit too "easy listening", I'm afraid, and it's never been one of my favourite Heron tunes. I do like the guitar playing on this cover, though, that's what gives it something extra and sets it apart from the flute-dominated original.

You Get Brighter (Tim Moon):

This one made it into the top 5 of my "Top Ten" favourite covers. One of the most successful "deconstructions" on the tape. In sound

alone, extremely unlike the original version, whose simplicity of arrangement has been traded for a not entirely uncharacteristic multi-tracked complexity. However, this cover retains the original's basic spiritual qualities and mantra-like progression. The use of fairly exotic instrumental timbres is ambitious, and an obvious homage to the ISB's own adventurousness. The sax solo is rather unexpected, and I think on balance it works (I do not intend to start another ruinous feud here!). The roving bass which kind of appears and disappears during the course of the track is an interesting effect too. The relative disappointment for me here, though, is the way the final "Krishna" section seems almost tacked on, as if Tim's not sure exactly how the transition ought to go (it's tricky, I know) - though when it eventually comes, it sounds right, with an effective use of percussion, extra voices etc., but on balance it seems to have taken too long to get there somehow..... an honourable B-plus, then.

Pictures in a Mirror (Fishman & the Sea Apes):

On first hearing, you think "what the hell's going on?" - it's so radical in sound and approach. The original was at fault in its opaque recording and extreme vocal torture and histrionics, preventing the full import of the lyrics from being realised - this cover brings the lyrics right up front, in a style which is the very antithesis of Robin's, (paradoxically) virtually expressionless yet strangely expressive, and in the end just as effective in its own way. The robotic, almost time-suspending feel of the generated percussion contrasts with, yet complements, the "real" wah-wah guitar. When Lord Randall's mother enters the story, Basia's vocal brings some tonal variety, with an honourably steady yet slightly four-square and stiff (but undeniably still expressive) quality to her delivery, and accompanied by a not-altogether-inappropriate almost-honky-tonk-piano backing track. The "archaic

Polish translations" are an interesting idea too. The return of the repeated "Deep in the hollow jail" refrain has a hypnotic effect, adding further overtones of meaning to an already striking image and bringing this interpretation full circle for the fadeout.

Painted Chariot (Hungry Ghosts):

Never one of my favourite Heron songs, I'll admit here and now, though this cover version seems to improve on the original for me - a good sign! The intro's chord sequence is here made to sound almost like an early Elton John intro (no, I'm not complaining!), and I also like the gentler approach, with the countryish tinge to the arrangement. The abrupt transition and tempo change to the "Hear the old prayers" section, though, I find unconvincing, and - after the harmonies of the preceding section - musically bereft. It's almost like two different songs, schizophrenic, the way it's done here. And why insert snatches of other lyrics, I wondered; perhaps there's a greater scheme at work here? No, this soulful section just seems to lead nowhere despite the good groove it eventually achieves; it transforms the song into a completely different musical experience, sure, but I'm not sure where it's at or where it's supposed to be going really. (Can someone enlighten me?.....) But thankfully we've lost the "heavy" thrash of that section of sustained power chords in the original version - that part always struck me as "ISB trying to do a Deep Purple"! Musically, the cover really does improve with repeated listenings, and the playing is assured, but I'm not sure what it all adds up to in the end. So close and yet so far, indeed.

Prize competition

A wonderful ISB prize for the first person to write in to me correctly identifying all the lyrical references in Norman's version of Painted Chariot - Adrian

There's still about 15 copies for the tape left (8.00 including postage in Europe) from me at 71 A Colvestone Crescent, London E8 2LJ. Adrian

Dear old battlefield (Beyond the Bars):

Rather lighter and airier than the original, and I really like the arrangement and the overall feel of the playing. The electric guitar is nice and subtle too, the solo restrained yet tasteful. The lead vocal here is more interesting than Robin's original, which always seemed just a bit ordinary for the lyric. I just wonder what Robin would have done with it in his pre-electric days (and without bass and drums)?....In the final analysis, this cover version - laudable though it is, doesn't really add any extra dimension to the song; but then, perhaps there's not anything to add.....

Tree/High Road to Linton (Walking the Witch):

This one came within my top 5. I didn't mind the lower transfer level, but shame about the distortion on the lead vocal. A lovely relaxed and laid-back interpretation, stressing incidentally the Eastern influences in the inflection of the backing. I like the various instrumental fills and inventive ornamentation. A tad awkward in the way a couple of corners are turned though. Finally, the transition to the High Road to Linton tune is great, the combination works really well, and moreover it's performed with gay abandon - it has a similar elative effect to the instrumental section that closes The Iron Stone, rounding the cover off neatly and inspiring.

October Song (Chris Taylor):

Though using a similar approach to the original version, Chris's reworking is notable principally for its rhythmic shifts and changes rather than for any startlingly diverse treatment of the lyrics. The instrumental combination echoes the sitar used in one of the ISB's own live versions, and is effective in itself; the playing is excellent. There's a slightly bluegrass tint to Chris's vocal delivery, which gives the song an unusual slant. The instrumental coda shows the Eastern influence and modality and maybe this could have been extended to good effect.

Cosmic Boy (F. Schöck e3 Y. Boraucke):

Always an awkward song for me, I've previously found it just a bit twee and unsatisfactory. Here though, it starts almost like it's going to be Empty Pocket Blues, and the guitar backing, though still simple, creates a more comfortable setting for the song than the somewhat gawky piano accompaniment of the original version. A fair set of marks for a brave try, but it's still not much of a song.

Banks of sweet Italy (Tänzers Traum):

Despite occasional Teutonic inflections in the vocals, this is a really good-sounding and sincere version of one of my favourite later-period Williamson ISB songs, with an imaginative arrangement which mirrors yet builds on the original. The timespan (I nearly wrote "earthspan"!) of the original is usefully expanded, by repeating the "middle eight" (the "golden rain" section) - I'd always felt the original should have done this, and it keeps the whole song in proportion by repeating the verse too. Ultimately, perhaps, it makes the total running time for the track a little lengthy; myself, I don't mind. This one still made it into my top ten!

First girl I loved (Gil Murray):

All in all, I'm not sure that this cover actually adds anything in the way of an extra dimension to the song, but I note the brave attempt at emulating Robin's guitar style, and yes I'm sure it's a sod to sing too! The fairly subtle changes to the song's structure are an interesting touch though (rather like Chris Taylor's October Song) - the extra instrumental linking sections before "I want you to know" and before "you're probably married now", for example, only sound "right" after a couple of plays (but we're so used to the original version on the 5000 Spirits album!). Presumably the changes in the lyrics - the first girl's hair colour is now brown not red, and "If I was lyin' near you now, I wouldn't be here (not sad) at all" - have a personal significance for Gil? Oh, and a small point, but I'm not convinced by the birdsong and (is it a?) school bell at the start. Maybe - and even after Judy Collins - any cover of this song just wouldn't sound right,

whoever sang it; this being despite the incredibly poignant combination of personal and yet universal feelings and experiences which the song evokes. A creditable cover no less. And one other small point - the cover doesn't feel unduly prolonged or drawn-out, but it's actually longer than Robin's original, despite a very similar arrangement!

Sailor and the Dancer (Shady Planet):

Sorry, I've never particularly liked the original, it's always seemed somewhat of a "Mystère de Mr. Le Maistre" to me, and this cover just doesn't help, it's the one real disappointment on the tape, 'cause it's so badly recorded too. Maybe it's of some significance for those who were there, but this leaves me totally unmoved I'm afraid. The words sound almost incidental to the instrumental playalong, with little or no dramatic development and seemingly no attempt at an individual interpretation of the lyric. All I can say is, I'm sure I'll be feeling more charitable towards the band's undoubted abilities when I catch them on form, rather than through the sea-fret of this ramshackle and somewhat unfocussed effort which does neither them nor the original song any credit.

Cold Days of February (Fez):

This one came within my top 5 - a refreshing, kind of "Cordelia's Stepfather" treatment (in direct contrast to the "straighter" and more expected interpretation on the first side of the tape, perhaps), with some great playing and an invigorating "angry" drive to match the lyric. Here's another version that is radically different in sound and approach to the original, which still retains many of the essential qualities of the original yet adds something new and distinctive; it deconstructs the original, and then proceeds to put it all back together again in a meaningful and convincing way. The icing on the proverbial cake is the rather fine guitar solo - it was a real shame that time constraints meant that the second break had to be faded out just as it was getting going.

The Circle is Unbroken (Kate Green):

First, it's a real shame that this track seques straight in on top of the fade of Fez's track, it's done too soon, and clips the beginning, denying the atmosphere a chance to register properly. To the cover itself, though; Kate's wonderfully expressive voice gets right into the song, though treating it with a completely different chordal feel and sound to the original. Here, it somehow comes across as more deliberate, in a way less effusive than Robin's unique, yet more overtly traditional-sounding keening style. Kate's vocal delivery is so much smoother, less raw than Robin's, yet no less intense for that, and she really brings out the full force of the lyrics. The decision to double the vocal line with a guitar was a brave one (especially in view of the distinctive sound-world of the original); it's an unexpected, unusual and innovative approach, and sits well with Kate's voice. For me, though, as with many listeners, nothing can ever efface the memory of Robin's vocals interspersed with bare organ chords and searing whistle on the original version (of all the ISB's songs, it's one of the hardest acts to follow!). This cover has fine instrumental playing all round too; interestingly the actual ending is different here, where the instrumental recapitulation of the first line's melody creates a feeling that the cycle is about to begin anew - seasons they'll change, all over again.

Oh..... and I'd better just mention (in dispatches):

The Son of Noah's Brother (Uncredited e3 unlisted):

The descending scale of the original version has been usefully tweaked here. In this cover, the actual vocal delivery is more metrically regular than Robin's - perhaps making it sound more like a religious chant? A nicely ironic touch, too, is the amplified triangle stroke at the end (which has overtones of the chimes which play out Lordly Nightshade), yet here the effect is suitably anti-climactic, even slyly satirical perhaps? A throwaway, perhaps, but whatever you think it's more than that.....(Ed: This was a "bonus track" at the end of side one on a random selection of the tapes)

GRAND-DAUGHTER LISTENERS' POLL

The winner of the 12" single "Knightfallen" by the Knights of the Occasional Table was selected by the Kooceadi Method. As many will know this consists of allotting different letters of the alphabet to numbers on a dice and setting a suitably ritualistic atmosphere by playing Creation. Mike Swann got the goods.

REVIEWS

Various readers took it upon themselves to do a short review of their favourite track:

PRIZEWINNER

GLAD HEARTS!

I nominate Spitting Feathers' version of Everything's Fine Right Now, because the players have taken a simple song and have treated it as it is meant to be played, light-heartedly with a twinkle in the eye. They have not tried to overelaborate or alter it beyond stamping their own personality on it.

An image springs to mind of six smiling faces truly enjoying themselves, spreading their euphoria onto the listener as used to happen at ISB concerts, where the audience was left with glad hearts and a wish that the songs and music would go on all night.

The handclapper also deserves a medal for holding the beat for the entire song. Well done son!

N. Rotherham.

Raymond and Deena awarded the HBGD out-takes compilation prize for this!

IT IS NOW

I doubt if anyone can cover a String Band song and sound anywhere near as good as the String Band did if they try to do it in a similar way. The voices, the instruments and the effortless air of the performance simply cannot be matched.

However, Hungry Ghosts have done a creditable imitation of part of Painted Chariot, created an interesting new verse and added to that an up to date composition of their own, interspersing various String Band phrases. This is no longer a cover version, they have made it their own. IT IS DIFFERENT, IT IS NOW!

Rosalind Lawton

THE CIRCLE IS UNBROKEN

The best track on the tape was undoubtedly saved till last! I don't know how anyone could follow that most haunting (and my favourite) Williamson track, but this has been perfectly achieved. Kate's melting, sublime vocals blend perfectly with the beautiful and sympathetic backing. This track is performed with all the sensitivity and dignity it deserves. The meaning is crystal clear, and not lost along the way. On first hearing it I knew straight away this was the track for me.

Well done Kate and co., you get a definite 11/10.

Sheena Bryson

FOR OTHER WHERE, OR A DISCO "PICTURES IN A MIRROR"

I rarely find String Band fans who agree with me, but I love "Pictures In A Mirror". It's one of the most dramatic and fascinating songs that Robin Williamson has ever written, as far as I'm concerned. I was enraptured by it the very first time I heard it, and it remains one of my favourites amongst the vast catalogue of Robin tunes.

So who would have thought that a very different version - almost a parody - of "Pictures in A Mirror" would have enraptured me just as much? But the funky beat, the twangy guitar, the Polish translations, and Adrian Whittaker's deadpan recital make Fishman and the Sea

Apes' version a more than stellar accomplishment. Look at their tails and scales! With subtle good humour, this "Pictures in A Mirror" turns a melodramatic and curiously avant-garde piece of L.

RonMania into the best disco song I've heard in years. Yes, you can dance to it! And as Adrian repeats "deep in the hollow jail" with not a drop of emotion in his voice, it's almost impossible to keep a straight face - if you're in the know. You can bet that even Lord Randall is rolling over in his grave - with laughter!

Areia Daphnaia

WARPED AND TWISTED

I thought on first listen to the Grand-Daughter tape that the best tracks were where the originals were reinterpreted, warped, twisted, dismantled, mangled, inverted, turned inside out or otherwise thoroughly messed about with by the interpreters. I mean, let's be honest, a perfectly executed, workpersonlike verbatim version of an ISB track may well be fun to hear live, or fun/challenging to perform, but doesn't merit being listened to on a tape when the original nestles nearby. But if someone grabs a favourite track and molests it, wrestles it to the ground and reinvents it like Adrian did with his really great version of Pictures in a Mirror, then it is certainly worth listening to. Anyway, I think he did a great job at sending Pictures spinning anew into the cosmos without doing any violence to its spirit.

Allan Frewin

THREE MINUTE FOLK CLASSIC

A wonderful joyous filigree mandolin welcome, ringing the doorbell - a surprise when you answer the door, tho', as the lead vocalist's undergone a sex change! Fresh and innocent, a tad fragile yet sure-sounding, she's tweaking the melody just a bit to fit more snugly, closer to breast. Rhythmwise the cover's looser than the original - now it just lopes along, relaxed and easy-going, yet with an almost funky way of keeping it all moving. Then there's that wonderful exuberant instrumental break, with playfully freewheeling mandolin and guitar jiggling and jazzing around in joyful interplay.

Glowing bright yellow and summery-cheerful, the clear bell-like tones of the mandolin, guitar and recorder combo create the perfect upbeat goodtime sound. A veritable 3-minute folk-pop classic - (like the original) at once spontaneous and perfectly crafted - that just makes me feel good!

D. Kidman

And a few stray comments....

Kate Green is a fine singer. I always thought I'd like the Circle is Unbroken for my funeral. I might just have to have her version now.

Richard Coxell

The sound quality is superb, the 'digital remastering' no doubt! Mine sounds even better than the 'original' master (more tactile), especially over speakers.....

The lead singer of 'Wood Dragon' sounds just like the lead singer of The Stone Roses! - made me smile!....Particular faves are 'Painted Chariot' (probably better than the original!), 'Circle is Unbroken' - she does it beautifully, that's my fave song in the entire universe, but she more than does it justice. I really like the entire version of 'Cold Days' as well - very different from mine! It's very Poguesy, very good guitar too.

Mike Swann

ARTICLE ASSEMBLED BY ADRIAN

**WOULD ANYONE LIKE TO
TAKE ON THE JOB OF
PUTTING TOGETHER A
VOLUME 2? Write to Adrian!**



Calendarium

Hans Deibschlag's *Calendarium* series of paintings is now available as a spiral-bound 13-leaf 594mm x 594mm volume in a limited edition of 150 copies. Each copy comes with a booklet containing Hans' own detailed commentary on the paintings and the overall concept; and a copy of his longtime chum Robin Williamson's specially commissioned live CD, which matches a song to each painting. (Hans painted the superb study of Sir Primalform Magnifico for the cover of Robin's *Songs For Children Of All Ages* album.)

As Hans says in his introduction, the paintings are conceived as "modern meditation images", which are "not meant to be glanced at in passing but [which] may assist the viewer in collecting himself or herself... My aim was to represent archetypal experiences by means of symbols that are not exhausted... I meant to create a work that is on the one hand precise in its meanings and on the other hand vague enough to allow for multi-layered interpretations." Sounds like meat and drink for us Stringheads!

Various symbols and characters recur in successive paintings. The red city, for example (the background to this layout), symbolises the "heart-chakra", the spiritual core; the hare and the hen are "symbols for the terror and constant anxiety of living in the material world"; and the butcher, Venus, and the cook (all present in the central frame) are respectively the bloodthirsty Father of the Gods, the archetypal Mother and love goddess, and the nurturant female force in nature. The relationships between them evolve with the evolving year.

The paintings have a stern beauty and offer endlessly fascinating vistas. Hans has expertly synthesised Renaissance brush techniques with Oriental motifs and briskly modern imagery.

The whole package is a thing of beauty and a joy forever, and is available from Hans, priced £120 inc p&p (USA \$220 inc p&p), at 2 West View Gardens, East Grinstead, West Sussex, RH19

4EH tel 01342 317386



BEGLAD 9

City and hare and hen from the *Januarius* painting; central frame from *Novembrius*