

NEWSLETTER No.2

NOVEMBER 2011

The official newsletter for the updated biography, due for release in autumn 2012, *DESIRE: Paddy McAloon's Prefab Sprout*. Includes background notes from the book's research, extracts from interviews and related stories, quotes and grapevine... contributions are welcome... what is it *you* wish to see in the book?

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"35 years of Prefab Sprout – a tribute"

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**Extract from John Birch's
interview with Paul Gomersall
June 2011.**



JB: How did you get involved with the recording and engineering of the album *Jordan: the Comeback*?

PG: Like most of work I got around that time I was never really sure where the recommendation came from. I was summoned to Thomas' studio (it was called Studio X, I think). There the band was in pre production for the album where I met Thomas & the guys & gal.

JB: You spent a good number of months working on *Jordan*. Although it's clear that you had already worked with some big names in the business, how do the *Jordan* months stand out for you?

PG: It was certainly the longest project I'd ever worked with and would only be superseded by George Michael's 'Older' album which took around 7 months. The great thing about both of these albums is I was working with people I related to and connected with so it was effortless - like hanging out with your mates all day.

JB: Are you proud of your involvement in the album?

PG: I'm not sure the word is pride but I love working on music that connects with people. I know how important music has been for me for land marking different times in my life whether it's the things I've been involved in or not. *Jordan* is one of the few albums I worked on that I listen to for fun. A lot of CDs I've been involved with bring back odd memories and for various reasons find it hard to listen to them. *Jordan* still amazes me with its different musical levels and each time I listen I hear all the work that was put in.

JB: How does it rank among all the other material you've been involved in over the years?

PG: One of my absolute favourites - making albums is very much about the people and experiences you had with them. *Jordan* has such a wealth of fantastic memories for me that when I hear it it's like looking at old photos and I'm right back there.

JB: I guess that the whole 19-track epic was a one-off for you and others in this production?

PG: Yeah, in terms of number of songs. It also took a long time, six months I think, to complete. I had previously worked with Trevor Horn & it wasn't uncommon for one song to take three months (Two Tribes, Relax, Slave to the Rhythm) so I was no stranger to this intricate way of working. The work I did with George Michael probably spanned the longest but a part of that was due to the songs being written at the same time.

JB: I notice that you were involved in *Astronauts and Heretics* later on, but did you know Thomas Dolby before *Jordan*?

PG: No, I got the gig after spending 6 months working on *Jordan*! Thomas was back in LA at this time & wanted Eddi Reader to do the duet on 'Shipbuilding'. She was amazing & pretty much nailed it first time. I did another take just so Thomas would have some options in case our tastes didn't match.

JB: Would you say that you normally 'mix for yourself'?

PG: Yeah I normally mix for myself then fix up anything people want – it took me 10 years to be able to sit back and say I was happy with the mix though. When you work with such luminary artists and producers, there's a lot of pressure to get things absolutely right before you present it. It teaches you, though, that at the end of the day there are only differences of opinions and they can (and do) change. I got over that a long time ago.

JB: What really does it for you in the creative process of mixing? Do you have a philosophy about mixing?

PG: I approach all mixing with the view of trying to tell the story of the song in its musical and lyrical form. Dynamic range doesn't really exist in pop music otherwise you'd have to keep turning the volume up and down on your car radio like you do with classical music so the dynamics are 'implied' with different frequencies coming in and out. I try and draw the listener in with different elements appearing throughout the song.

JB: Do you think that good music can survive commercially without reverb, delays and affects?

PG: Except for drums and things that need delays for rhythm I always mix with no effects until the last hour or so – if it doesn't sound good dry, effects won't fix anything. I like to have the mix pretty much finished before I decide what space I want things in.

JB: MAC or PC?

PG: PC - I had both once but Macs give me hand cramps for some reason and looking after two systems is hard work. I'm not a big fan of Apple's dictatorship business methods either. I like getting my hand dirty with computers; I never have the side panels on as I'm always putting & pulling bits out. If it breaks down I'll nip down the local computer shop and fix it in an hour instead of being charged a fortune and the machine being sent away for a few weeks.

JB: What toys are you playing with today?

PG: If I can't do it in the computer I don't do it. I took up mixing in the box many years before most people realised you could do it. Part of the necessity for me was moving to Australia where the music/studio situation isn't quite as buoyant as England or America. I needed a way of acting independently of labels and studios and work from home. I'm a big fan of the Universal Audio plugins but generally over the last 4 or 5 years the plugin quality has become so good that there really aren't any excuses for not being able to pull off a decent mix in the computer any more. For me, mixing on a desk seems way too limiting now.

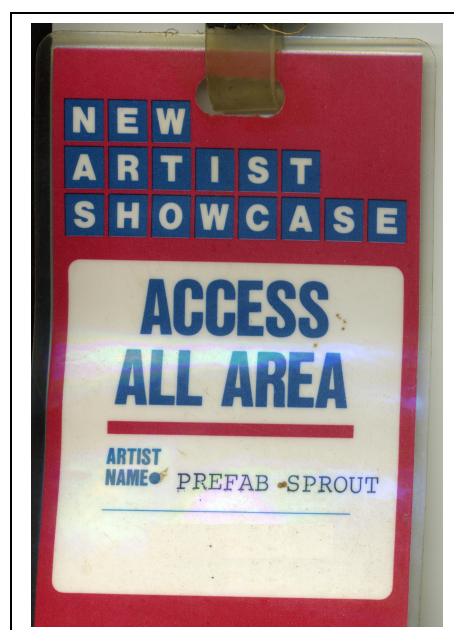
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Prefab Sprout tour passes

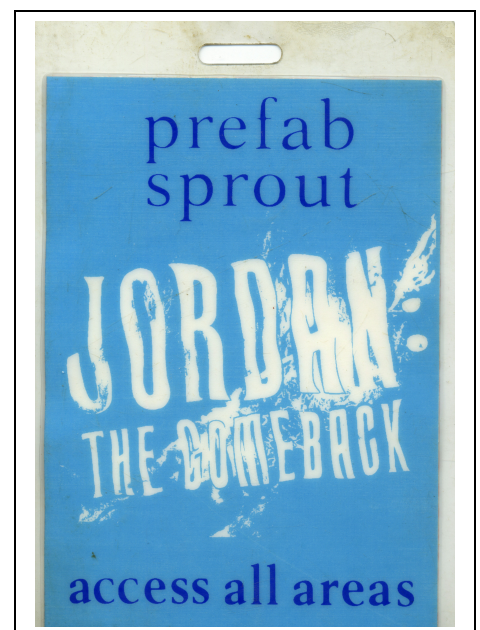
(Courtesy of Zorro and Pitbull)



1985



Japan 1986



1990



2000... hopefully not the last ever Sprout gig?

The Pleasure and Pain of Collecting

by Tim – Part Two

During the 1980s, the sale of bootleg recordings became something of a cottage industry. Where it had previously been difficult and expensive to press vinyl copies of live tapes, and difficult to smuggle bulky recording equipment into gigs, now anyone with a dual cassette dubbing deck and a Walkman recorder was able to produce tapes of very decent quality for sale. Bootleg stalls, selling TDK-D tapes with Xeroxed inserts were common round many markets in university towns, and were a major part of the Camden Town market in London. Stallholders would maintain a week or two of exclusivity around a title before passing sub-masters around to other traders, and it seemed that most concerts in any town were available. What wasn't available locally could often be found by scanning and decoding the classified section of the music press, where "rarities" were often available.

However whereas in the 1970s the acquisition of a murkily recorded two disk Kornyfone records vinyl set would be something remarkable for a fan and result in a highly prized item, the availability of tapes in large numbers meant that their owners regarded them as throwaway souvenir items, and because they were quick and easy for a trader to duplicate, they were created in relatively small numbers as needed without the minimum pressing quantity for vinyl. What this has meant for collectors is that even where recordings are known to exist, many have disappeared, and originals and early generation copies are almost impossible to locate.

And if that sounds like a plea to check attics and old boxes for tapes, that's exactly what it is. There is certainly more Prefab Sprout live material hidden away from the mid 1980s, but as time passes what there is is increasingly destined for landfill sites. Anything and everything is sought for preservation, even if it seems to be available already.

We left the chronology of recordings at the end of the Swoon tour, with Steve McQueen about to be recorded. In the run up to the release, the band played a few dates with Kevin Armstrong – erstwhile Bowie collaborator – on guitar, and Michael Graves on keyboard. Armstrong brought a strong if incongruous rock edge to the band, best exemplified on the wonderful and unaccountably unreleased Rebel Land played on that tour and for the John Peel session from the same period.

Indeed several Radio 1 sessions were recorded in which Armstrong is very prominent, and the version of Bonny "Live at Acapulco Rolf's" which emerged as a B side is most likely an outtake from one of these given Paddy's exhortation to "tell the listeners!" in the instrumental break. The band followed on with a few TV promotional performances with live or re-recorded music, including "Bliss" performing a thumping version of "Faron Young", and "Hold Tight", a childrens' game show where they appeared on pneumatic platforms and Paddy nearly knocked his teeth out with a microphone. At the time of writing these performances have all escaped the attention of the copyright police on YouTube.

The best recording I've heard from that mini-tour is undoubtedly the Leeds Warehouse show, which is a fine audience recording sold as a street market bootleg, and a relaxed Paddy dedicates songs to relatives in the audience, and to Feona Attwood who had a bit part on the single "The Devil has all the Best Tunes" sharing backing vocals with Wendy. There is also a very acceptable tape from the Manchester International concert that has been widely circulated, but look for the

upgraded version which is less topky in the mix (I'll give some hints on precisely where to look in the concluding piece of this account, next time).

However the missing treasure from this tour – and a recording known to have been in the hands of fans as late as 2000 but now frustratingly missing in action – is the closing date from the Dominion Theatre, for which Thomas Dolby came onto the stage to play keyboards for “When the Angels” and the encores. Anyone knowing the whereabouts of a copy of this recording is strongly urged to get in touch so it can be restored to the canon.

This short “Great Escape” tour was followed in the autumn with the “Two Wheels Good” tour, which was far more extensive and covered most of Europe. It was supposed to have been based around the release of “Protest Songs” which failed to be released as planned on that tour because of the success of “When Love Breaks Down”. Kevin Armstrong left the touring band due to other commitments and Paddy was restored to full guitar duty, though for the early dates Wendy had a throat problem and was unable to perform. This tour was very widely recorded.

Highlights include a wonderful soundboard recording of the Cardiff University concert, the BBC Reading University In Concert which was of course recorded by just about anyone with an FM receiver and has been broadcast many times since all over the world, and the German Alabamahalle gig which was filmed and has been made available in a very high quality form following digital rebroadcasts in the early 2000s. It's fairly easy to find on DVD and is currently posted on YouTube. An off air tape of the original live broadcast is rumoured to exist, and would be a considerable discovery if it were to turn up. It's interesting to contrast the band from this video with that from the Swoon tour: the performances are more polished, and Wendy has truly found her feet as a performer, yet the overall effect is detached and unengaged. It's a good performance but lacks spark. You get the strong impression that in Paddy's mind this was a duty, not a pleasure, and he was ticking off the dates until the time he could get back home to write new material.

But the best concert recording from this tour is the Fabrik Hamburg gig which emerged on Dimeadozen – a file sharing site - only quite recently. This is an audience tape, but the curious architecture of the venue in which there is a bridge above the stage provided an excellent taping spot and there is very little audience chatter. And the atmosphere was stunning, with the band responding with a wonderful performance and an unheard of additional encore. At the end of the tape, one of the entourage – possibly Keith Armstrong – comes up and tells the audience that this was the best gig of the tour. And so it was. Very highly recommended.

An honourable mention also for the Utrecht FM broadcast shortly following the Hamburg performance. This was broadcast by Capital Radio and Dutch radio, with slightly differing song selections, and an excellent mix which to my ears is vastly superior to the BBC In Concert from Reading. An extended tape of the concert from the Capital Radio archive is listed in the British Library Sound Archive, split into sections, the broadcast segment and the edited “rushes”, but the chances of this emerging seem remote.

The tour continued into the following year with a few dates in Italy in which Prefab Sprout had a strong and demonstrative following. The opening date in Turin had to be postponed as snow caused problems for the lorries transporting equipment, but as tapes from Milan and Bari show, the tour was a great success and the band played a very much extended set in front of hugely enthusiastic fans. The Milan recording probably shades it in a comparison with Bari, but both are worth a listen. And the band finally closed in Turin on the rearranged date; although a tape of this concert was being circulated via Usenet a few years later, I have never been able to find a copy.

A one off concert at the Hammersmith Odeon followed, with substantially the same set as for Italy, but neither of the two recordings I'm aware of is anything special or particularly worth seeking out. So we can pass forwards to another classic recording, this time from a 2 date “Showcase” tour in Japan.

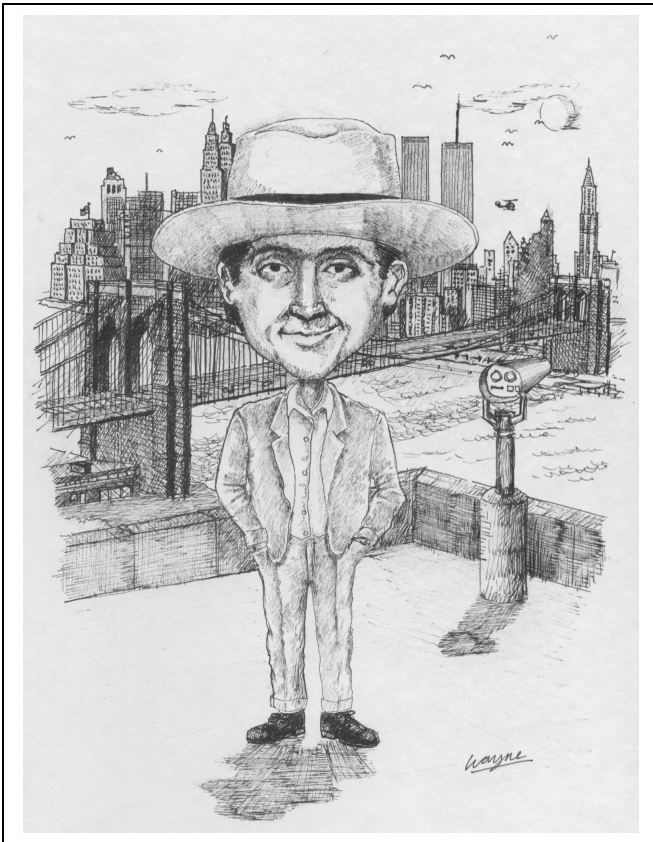
The July Kousei Nenkin hall, Tokyo, date was broadcast on FM radio in Japan, and is a superb mix. Gary Hughes replaced the unavailable Michael Graves on keyboards, and the keyboard sounds used are often quite different, possibly reflecting the use of borrowed local gear. A couple of different off air recordings are circulating of this concert, with the most common suffering from a little bit of FM interference and some hiss. However the concert was circulated locally in Japan on a bootleg called “Sprouted Shows”, and this is a pristine FM recording that has been circulated on Dimeadozen recently. The version of Cruel from this concert is arguably the best recording of the song anywhere.

If we discount the one off performance of “The Golden Calf” on TV's “Big World Café”, coincidentally also included in audio form on “Sprouted Shows”, and in which Wendy played keyboards to give her something to do, that would be it for live performances until the band re-emerged for a tour to support Jordan in 1990.

Sketchy Memories – Calls for an Updated Sketch of Paddy

In the 1993 book *Myths, Melodies & Metaphysics: Paddy McAloon's Prefab Sprout*, Wayne Brierley provided sketches of each band member of Prefab Sprout.

Now, we are seeking a good quality sketch (or painting) that represents Paddy in his present, bearded form. Are there any budding artists out there? Here's an opportunity to have your image of Paddy Mac in print...



Paddy back in 1988, portrayed standing in front of the World Trade Centre buildings.

*"But what are they to do?
These myths belong to you,
We live them till they're true"*



~o~

Who the Hell is Scott McPherson?

By John Birch

Musician Scott McPherson lives in Fircrest, Washington, USA. He was generously introduced to me by major Sprout fan and font of modern music knowledge, Scott Travis.

Not long after I'd contacted Scott McPherson, he'd sent me some old demos and recordings he'd made over the last 20 plus years, gushing about how great an influence that Paddy McAloon had had on his songwriting over the years, but admitting that in retrospect, he'd almost wilfully suppressed the elements that made the song identifiable in terms of its influences... something that he now seemingly is starting to regret. Scott takes up the story...

I found my original demo for *Moody (Bury it Like a Fad)*. This tune embodies the Paddy influence and style in a very obvious way. It's clearly more of an idea than a finished song ready to re-record seriously, but to my ears, especially after hearing Sondre Lerche's ode to Paddy (*I Cannot Let You Go*), I have come to realize that I shouldn't shun so many songs from my past because they sound too much like 'whomever,' much like Sondre.

The demo must be from at least 1987 or 86, and it's 4-track tape to boot, so the quality across the board is total crap. Still, I still feel a bit embarrassed about it, so I'd prefer not to share it just yet. I want to finish, record from scratch and produce *Moody*, then hand it off to you to share with others. If I do tackle this tune I will of course give it the grand Prefab Sprout production as best I could, which is always fun to do! Lots of keyboards and fun vocals. My wife actually sang some Wendy-style 'sparse' backing vocals on another song/project I was a part of called *Vanilla*, and I have always wanted to use her on one of my songs in a Prefab style.

Take a listen to *Give the Farm Away*. It's really just a quick and short demo of a song I did to wrap around a Prefab-style keyboard sound I wrote for my Roland D50 back in the day. I think it was recorded in around 1989/1990. Anyway, I have been such a huge fan of Prefab Sprout since I first heard them in 1982, which was probably the time of *Lions in My Own*

Garden. When I was digging through old demos I came across this one and thought, "Hmm, I bet Paddy would get a kick out of this," being that it pays such great homage to him.

And of course Paddy has very much influenced my writing style, no doubt.

<http://dl.dropbox.com/u/31885321/Give%20The%20Farm%20Away.wav>

I'd also like to share *The Redundant Romantic*, since it's very, very Paddy influenced. I wrote this while I was in the band Liar's Club, but it's pretty much all me other than John Vangen on the drums.

<http://dl.dropbox.com/u/31885321/The%20Redundant%20Romantic%20Fool.mp3>

I've been side tracked with other media projects so I have neglected music for a while. Still, there is a band camp site for Liar's Club somewhere - my previous band to Tiny Volcano. I know you can listen or download songs from there.

I've just remembered an obscure Seattle band that Liar's Club use to gig with, called Bake. These guys were all trained via the better music schools and it showed, and of course they were big Sprout fans... but the best part was when they did the occasional Sprout cover song at a gig. I saw them do *Wicked Things* live and they were really impressive. They had also written a few songs that were 'born of Paddy', as it were. I will contact Eric Weber - the front guy and writer of the band and see if he has any of that stuff on file (I'd love to share it), since it gave me goose bumps back in the day.

Liar's Club was a joint songwriting effort, while Tiny Volcano was simply my thing, or rather my songs. I have been working on a follow-up CD, but that sort of slowed dramatically when our band-mate and bass playing pal Tony Cooper passed away, so it's a bit stagnant right now.

My last band/project, Tiny Volcano, has a MySpace presence that has a handful of songs posted... but not much.

Here is a link to the Facebook page for Tiny Volcano. If you sort through it, there are a few random songs posted there...

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Tiny-Volcano/115290201846179>

Tiny Volcano did very well as far as reviews go, and sales were fair too... but I never really took the bull by the horns and pushed it in terms of promotion. It gained steam in the Southern California underground pop scene, but it didn't do much overseas.

JB: After listening to your recordings, I picked out three tunes that seemed to me to be rather Beach Boys influenced:

Girl from Heaven (Liar's Club circa 1993/94)

<http://dl.dropbox.com/u/31885321/Liars%20Club%20-%20Girl%20From%20Heaven.mp3>

Summer Solstice (Tiny Volcano) 2002/2003

<http://dl.dropbox.com/u/31885321/Summer%20Solstice.mp3>

Jaded (demo) 2004 or 2005 - not sure exactly

<http://dl.dropbox.com/u/31885321/Jaded.mp3>

SMcP: It's funny you should compare them all to Beach Boys/Brian Wilson, since *Girl From Heaven* was always referenced to McCartney circa 1967 and *Jaded* (whom not many have heard) was compared to Harry Nilsson. In fact, I have a rough version with Zak Nilsson (son of Harry) playing drums on this. Zak was in the band The Records with John Wicks, so I sent it to him and he agreed to lay down some drums, but sadly he used 'Garageband' and at the time he could only send me a stereo mix for whatever reason, so I wasn't able to use them.

As you suggested, Dream Academy made a big impression on me as well as Prefab, XTC, Beatles, Beach Boys and a ton of New Wave and British bands. I probably would have written much more heavily influenced Prefab material if it were not for being caught in the heavy pull of the Liars Club moon, which was more geared for the basic influences like Beatles, Beach Boys and XTC.

JB: What did you think of the Sondre Lerche link I gave you on YouTube?

SMcP: *I Cannot Let You Go* was deliberate homage... almost a Frankenstein of Paddy ideas and lyrics. Still, it's extremely catchy and fun to listen to on repeat. Not to mention he did it really well! Having said that and having listened to an earlier release from him, as well as *Heartbeat Radio*, the Prefab influence is so strong with the 'after effects' of discovering the Sprouts. You can hear it all over that album... and quite frankly it inspired me to the point of rethinking my current direction of song writing. It forced me to consider the attitude of, "Hey, why not be heavily influenced?" I've always tried to dumb down my influences, hide them, as I believed I would end up a bad clone. But after hearing Sondre, I realized that you could embrace that influence, and if you do it well enough people will feel it and like it...

JB: So you're going to revisit your songwriting, so to speak?

SMcP: ...which leads me to an ambitious idea I'm toying with.

A challenging, yet appealing idea popped into my head this morning while digging through my old demos, and that is the possibility of recording a full length album of original songs that are clearly and solely paying great homage to Paddy and the Sprouts. I recently considered Bleu's LEO project which pays clear tribute to Jeff Lynne and I wondered at that moment, "Had anyone done this for Prefab Sprout yet?" And I thought, "Hmm... I know I can write things somewhat similar to Paddy without trying, but I wonder what I could do if I really put my mind to it.

Which, of course, has always been taboo. I mean, who wants to adopt someone else's musical identity? Yet Bleu did it so magically and I know for a fact he had more fun on that project than most.

So, obviously I would need the time, and some confidence that it would pay for itself at least. Do you think the Sprout fan base would treat this album as a sack religious beast or a throwback tribute that is merely just 'fun to take on'? Of course, this idea is assuming the songs are great and the production is too.

I must admit, I am very much bored with the Tiny Volcano idea, but reinventing under a new name with a new mission? Very exciting indeed! And very inspiring. I never cared about making a zillion dollars from music, I only knew that I needed to do it... to write and record it. That's all I cared about when I was growing up. But things are different now, you know... you get older, married, have kids and priority's change. I'm 47 and I have numerous hobbies, but inspiration drives them and I'm feeling inspired right now, much like when I was younger.

What do you think..? Too grandiose?

JB: Why don't we open the idea up to the readers? I'll add the suggestion to the next newsletter... thanks, Scott.

Since this interview, Scott has been working on offering up an amazing interactive project for musical Prefab Sprout fans. He needs a month or so to prepare the 'pitch', so look out for Issue 3. It will be a unique opportunity for fans to re-fan the embers of the earlier albums in a very original way... I've said too much... keep with us!

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“35 Years of Prefab Sprout” Tribute Gig

Newcastle, September 2012

Live music dedicated to Paddy McAloon and Prefab Sprout
Convention – Collector's Fair – Speakers – Quiz with Highly Collectable Prizes
Book launch “Desire: Paddy McAloon's Prefab Sprout”

Notes:

Venue capacity of approximately 150 anticipated

Possible dates for the event: Sat 15th, Sat 22nd, or Sat 29th September 2012

Unique merchandise will also be available

Special occasion programme

Event is being filmed as part of a documentary on the band

Special Guests will be in attendance

Performers (to be confirmed):

Re-forming of Glasgow-based Sunset Gun (and This Mortal Coil) sisters Louise and Denise Rutkowski

Duet from USA: Analise Bailey (vocals) and Steve Daly (guitar)

Mark Goodall – an 'unplugged' tribute

Jordan & The Comebacks tribute band

***We are actively seeking fans to participate in this event, so please contact us to register your interest

Venues:

Where could we host this? We are receptive to your suggestions – maybe a place with a Prefab link? Budgets are to be presented early in 2012.

Entry:

Ticket sale only – entry will not be payable on the door

By special advanced purchase of the book from 1st March 2012 (details in the next newsletter)

By ticket sale (if still available), on a first-come-first-served basis, from 1st August 2012

Advance provisional bookings can be made to John Birch via johnbirch1960@yahoo.co.uk

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM THE EVENING?

HOW COULD YOU HELP ON THE DAY/NIGHT?

What can you contribute?

You may be surprised at how you can contribute towards the book. Please feel free to contact me if you can help with any of the following:

- 🕒 If you have any memorabilia of historical significance relating to Prefab Sprout
- 🕒 We are seeking photographs for the book – any kind considered, but must be of a good quality
- 🕒 Any old newspaper, magazine or fanzine articles
- 🕒 Maybe you would like to see something in particular covered in the book... well, what is it?
- 🕒 We would be happy to consider suggestions or submissions for a front cover
- 🕒 Maybe you have some rare documents that could be of use?

Feel free to contact John at johnbirch1960@yahoo.co.uk



Paddy and Jess Bailey, live at Dublin in April 2000, courtesy of Mick Lynch

[Paddy and Mart rescue Wendy from railtrack suicide >>>](#)

SATURDAY LIVE



WITH
BRYAN BURNETT

WHY PREFAB SPROUT GOES TO WORK BY BUS

PREFAB SPROUT'S Paddy McAloon may be one of the most admired song writers in the music business but fame and fortune haven't gone to his head.

Not for him the life of being ferried around in record company limousines. When Paddy McAloon goes to work, he hops on the nearest bus.

And even travelling on a double decker every day, Paddy claims to be not mobbed by eager fans. Apart from the once, that is.

"I was upstairs listening to my personal stereo," he explained. "This guy sat down in front of me with his girlfriend. I could see through his carrier bag that he'd just bought our album.

"He spent the whole journey whispering to his girlfriend and it wasn't until he was getting off that he turned round to me and said: 'It is you, isn't it?'"

Paddy happily signed autographs and quickly added that if the situation were reversed he would probably do the same.

"If I saw Paul McCartney I would ask him what he was doing on a bus and get his autograph."

Apart from not getting Paul McCartney's autograph, his one big regret was that their recent single, Cars and Girls, wasn't a hit.

"I was gutted," he wailed. But all hope is not lost as the band have persuaded record company CBS to re-release it as their next single.



Prefab Sprout — Cars and Girls to be re-released