

NEWSLETTER No.7

JULY 2013

The official newsletter for the updated biography, due for release in August 2014, *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!

In this issue:

Prefab Sprout live in 2000 – the Fleadh itinerary

New album leaked. Plus an blogger's review of the tracks ...

New German feature on Prefab Sprout in Musik Express magazine

Rare photographs – first time published (from 1984 and 1985)

Update on The Prefab Sprout Project

Kitchenware – going, going, but not gone!

~o~

WORLD EXCLUSIVE – NEW ALBUM!

This press exclusive press release was broken on Scott McPherson's Facebook site on Friday 13 July....

John Birch and Scott McPherson (The Prefab Sprout Project) have been invited by Icebreaker LLP to a low-key private hearing of the upcoming album recorded by Paddy McAloon in London. Since 2004, Icebreaker has been bringing together investors, entrepreneurs and creative talent. There is a particular emphasis on commercial projects in the creative and technology industries. Income from these projects is shared between the relevant Icebreaker LLP and the individuals and companies involved.

Icebreaker will be behind the release of the album under licence, scheduled for release on 7 October 2013, in a deal brokered by Keith Armstrong.

The business of each LLP has involved acquiring licences from writers, inventors and other third parties. The LLPs have paid further third parties to exploit these licences, with a view to sharing in the revenue generated from the worldwide distribution of products based on the licences and other commercial arrangements.

Paddy will be meeting with Icebreaker in London next week for a photo session to start off the album promotion. There is album artwork right now, which we will share once it has been approved, together with more information from the press pack.

Interestingly, Icebreaker's promotion strategy will include the targeting, educating and expansion of the fan base age bracket 18-30. Icebreaker currently has a rich base of clients, including Sinéad O'Connor, Andrea Corr, Ali Campbell, Beverley Knight and Marilyn Manson.

For more information, read on in this issue's article on Kitchenware Records...

The Prefab Sprout Project... update by Scott McPherson

The drum sessions with Neil Conti went great! Better than I could have ever imagined. I was blown away by his percussive interpretation for every song, his ideas are fantastic. and I was thrilled with the amount of "Sproutisms" or Prefab references I was hearing. I think that fans of Neil's work will have a lot of fun picking out clear references to songs like "We Let The Stars Go", "Looking For Atlantis" and several from "Steve McQueen" and "Protest Songs". I'm sure there are more, I just need to listen closer with the headphones on.



Neil today
photo courtesy of N. Conti



Neil at the Appetite video shoot, Newcastle
photo courtesy of Paul Ludford

I've attached a photo from the project session. Neil gives us a big thumbs up! His assistant, Jeff - made it known that they had a ball with the session and they enjoyed the material quite a bit. In fact, Jeff was cool enough to leave the witty comments and laughter at the end of each take, so I think I might leave some of that on for a song or two. I recall that Prefab did that with "Horsin' Around" or "Moving The River" (can't recall which), but I liked hearing the band chatter at the beginning and end of the tune.

Now that I have the drums to build on, I will be assigning parts to the willing musicians involved. And I should mention to all musicians out there ... that this is a global project and if you have the desire, skill and means to record an instrument for a song or two - then please do contact me, I'd love to put you to work.
scott@ThePrefabSproutProject.com

And speaking of musicians, I was fortunate to secure some of the talent from Brian Wilson's band. Multi-instrumentalist Probyn Gregory will lend his talent to a track or two, as well as his pal Bob Ramstein - who was a former member of Brian's band and currently resides with the great "Mello Cads". I've got emails out to a few other folks I hope will consider joining in on the fun and another who has quite a relative connection to the sprouts. You never know who might show up on this album!

*We are still on track for a late October release, and you can still reserve a CD via the Pre-Order page on the home site: www.theprefabsproutproject.com
There will be a limited run on CD's, but the digital download option will always be available for both the album and the non-album bonus songs.*

Scott McPherson

Prefab Sprout's "The Devil Came a-Calling": a review

Since I discovered the leak of this album some weeks ago, I was really shocked to see that it had become one of the most visited posts in this blog (in fact it is, by now, the second most visited post ever, with almost 4,000 visits at this time). So it is obvious there is actually a big interest on the new music from Paddy McAloon/Prefab Sprout, contrary to my own, low expectations.

I have been thinking for a while if I should post a review of this album, given its status as fully unofficial release, and given the complete lack of information we have on the way it was leaked, and on the possible plans of Paddy for these songs.

Eventually I decided I will post such a review, since in internet, something that has been leaked, is out there to all effects, good or bad. I'm pretty convinced that Paddy must be rather unhappy about this leak, but at this point there's nothing we can do about.

*So, before going into any detail, please let me state from scratch (for the improbable case that Paddy ever reads this humble review) that I am a longtime follower of Paddy McAloon/Prefab Sprout, and that I think Paddy is one of the few actual geniuses of pop music in the 80s. I own all of his albums (in various formats), and I deeply admire his commitment, his art, and specially the strong courage he has demonstrated in the last decade to overcome health issues to continue releasing jewels, such as *I trawl the megahertz* or *Let's Change the World with Music*.*

In short: this review is not intended to infuriate Paddy. On the contrary, my intention is to express my admiration for his music, and to stimulate his work in music. Paddy's talent is way too big to let it forgotten on the side of the music world in this century. (And in case someone is wondering, no, I am not going to redistribute this album, although I think it is available out there in the jungle of internet).

Finally, some background: I know by memory all Prefab Sprout albums, Steve McQueen is the first vinyl I ever purchased (back in 1985, when I was 18 years old... ah, the glory days!). To say I love that album would be a huge understatement. And, in case it was not clear enough already, Prefab Sprout is one of my alltime reference bands in music, together with The Smiths and Scritti Politti, and of course together with Prince.

That's it for preliminaries. Now, let's go to the meat.

*As I have written in my previous post on this album, it appeared out of nowhere at Soundcloud in March 2013, and was only noticed (at least, that I know) in June 8, 2013, strangely one day after Paddy's birthday. This means that we only have a set of 128 kbps mp3 files to judge, and that we lack any reliable information on the track list of the album. Furthermore, we have no reliable information on the title: initially it was reported as "*Trapdoor Melancholy*", but later most people refer to it by using the title of one of the songs, "*The devil came a-calling*". There are hints to albums signed by Paddy with those albums reported elsewhere, but there is absolutely no confirmation that this collection of songs is entitled this way.*

Hence I will use the order of the songs, such as I have been listening to them in the last weeks.

Beyond the restrictions in audio quality imposed by a lossy format as mp3, I would like to say first that these recordings sound too polished to believe it was simply a draft recording to be later reworked prior to a final release. I might be wrong on this, and maybe Paddy is even more picky than we expect when he prepares a draft recording. Besides, I think the voice of Paddy sounds here younger than his current voice, such as it's displayed, for instance, in the acoustic version of Steve McQueen. Again, I might be wrong, but my ears tell me this is not a recording made in 2012 or 2013.

Therefore I think this is a recording in an advanced stage, made some years ago, and certainly intended for a commercial release, given the coherence in the sound and the quality of songs; furthermore, there is a clear potential for singles in several of them, which reinforces my feeling that this is an album almost finished. The only thing that smells unfinished is the keyboardish harmonica parts (i.e. Billy), which I expect would be replaced by actual harmonica in the final recording. Other than that, this sounds good enough and credible enough for a fully fledged, commercial album, with a careful, very well crafted production, and with a quality in the singing or the instrumental performance that has nothing to envy from past albums from Paddy. Having said all of that, I think that the master Thomas Dolby was not involved in this recording, or if he was, at least he restricted his usually superlative powers to create a detailed yet down-to-earth sound that perfectly fits the songs.

And the songs, the songs, the songs... they are magnificent! Maybe I am still under the aura of the huge surprise, but I have written before -and I keep on thinking- that this is possibly the second best album from Prefab Sprout, if we exclude "I trawl the megahertz" as a Paddy solo recording. And this is, for me, a tremendous accomplishment, since "Steve McQueen" is a masterpiece as it can be, with nothing to envy from the best albums from any band of any period in pop music.

To give some brief brushstrokes on the songs (and excuse me for leaving any analysis on lyrics for later):

Adolescence is in my opinion the weak song of the bunch; Paddy makes a passionate interpretation, but still I think there is a somehow lacking melody, and it reminds me of some filler material in albums from well known musicians when they are not very inspired.

Billy makes a sharp contrast, since it has a very catchy melody, and it would surely make a strong single in this album. The computer harmonica sounds a bit weird in the context of a simple, nice, attracting production, but the song flows nicely and Paddy's command with the voice and you get the feeling that this sounds a zillion times better than the crap you listen usually in today's charts.

Grief Built the Taj Mahal is one of the true jewels in this album, with the classic, elaborate writing of Paddy in lyrics, and with a delicious melody enhanced by a tempo that builds up in a perfect manner. This is Paddy at his best: the phrasing, the emotion, the chorus, the originality... everything is there, there's his bold signature shouting aloud "this is Prefab Sprout!!". I just love this song.

Mysterious is the other obvious single in the album. It's a misleading, streamlined melody with a complexity hidden by the main lines, which stick to your mind immediately. It sounds fantastic (albeit again with that weird harmonica), and it reminds you of the best material written by Paddy in the past, without being overly reminiscent of any song.

And then we reach the crowning of the album, The best jewels thief in the world. This is pure pop perfection, every sound falls in the exact right place. In an ideal world, this should be a smash worldwide hit, and it's about the best lesson any pop star in the making might learn (Gaga and Madonna and other nobodies have their duties here). I can hardly imagine how to improve this work of beauty, although I am convinced that Thomas Dolby could do it. It has been stuck in my head since my first listen, and everytime the pleasure of listening is the same. Even the weird alarm sounds sound perfectly fine here, and you can't avoid to sing along, everytime, everytime... Paddy for president!!

The song giving title (?) to the album, The devil came a-calling, comes next, and it's a bit underwhelming after the unstoppable joy of the previous song. But still it manages to catch your attention. It is one of those whose precise, detailed, clean production make hard to believe this is any kind of draft. Icing on the cake, Paddy's way of singing, with plenty of nuances along the song, evidences once more he's the master of pop.

The dreamer is the third jewel of the album: there's an unmistakable piano riff, a classic overall sound, and an emerging grandeur which puts this song apart of most contemporary music. Furthermore, it plays with repetition in a charming manner, and succeeds in creating a rewarding feeling every time the riff is repeated. Did I write pop perfection already? "Where are your dreams?", appropriately asks Paddy.

The list of impossible things is one of those minor Prefab Sprout songs which would be major in any other band. In an album with many possible singles, this is another clear candidate, and Paddy's voice sounds in astonishingly good shape. I don't know who played guitar in here, but he did a beautiful work in combination with the fine melody.

The old magician spells classicity in every pore, from the beginning to the chorus to the last verse. I can almost imagine Paddy teaching how to write a pop song for newcomers while playing this song, and figure out their faces in wonder after listening to this song.

The final song, *The songs of Danny Gallway*, is an appropriate end for the album (even if we don't know if it actually ends this way). It's another case of inspiration deployed with a quintessential Prefab Sprout structure, different layers of vocals combined with exquisite taste.

All in all, I couldn't be happier about this album. The last "proper" Prefab Sprout album, *The gunman and other stories*, was a bit of disappointment to me, and later releases were either rehash (Steve McQueen remastered/acoustic) or old recordings. With "*The Devil Came a-Calling*" I recovered all my hopes regarding new material from that genius of pop called Paddy McAloon.

So I hope this album will be officially released by the band: the sooner, the better. The current generation deserves to discover the full magic of a musician of the stature of Paddy.

Posted by Cateto - Tuesday, 2 July 2013 – Source: <http://catetoblog.blogspot.co.uk/>

PREFAB SPROUT SCHEDULE FOR THE LONDON FLEADH

Thurs. 8th Rehearsals at:- Studio 2, "The Depot"
16-24, Brewery Rd. London N7.
t:020 7609 1366 fx:7609 6844

10.00 am. Load in
10.56 am. Paddy & Martin dep. Newcastle - arr.Kings X 1.50p
3.00 pm. Band arrival at Depot.
10.00 pm. Curfew
Passes, Guest tickets & Parking passes to be issued today. Guests must have passes in advance.

Fri. 9th. Rehearsals continue at Depot - times to be agreed
Studio available from 10am. to 10 pm.

CALL KATE RAMSAY - 07803 170 916.

Sat. 10th. SHOW DAY

3.30 pm. Sprouts backline to be on site
4.00 pm. Band departure time from Marriott Hotel.
(Neil & Jess can come to hotel or make own way to site as preferred.)

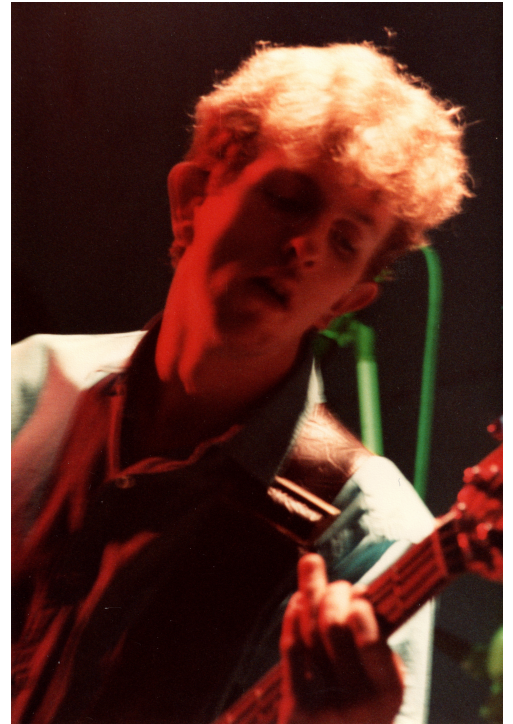
5.00 pm. All Sprouts personnel to be on site.
6.15 pm. Kirsty MacColl finishes, - change over starts.
6.35 pm. PREFAB SPROUT on stage
7.20 pm. End of set. - load out.

Sun.11th. Geordies back to the hard north!

Hotel: Regents Park Marriott,
128, King Henry's Rd., London NW3 3ST.
t:020 7722 7711 fx:020 7586 5822
Paddy & Martin at hotel 8, 9 & 10th.
- Harry 9th only, Phil 10th only.

607 - Maurice
543 - Paddy

Photos, courtesy of Paul Ludford, ex-director of Kitchenware Records



Top left, clockwise:

- 1) Backstage at Dundee University 18 October 1985
- 2) Live at Glasgow 'Night Moves' 24 February 1984
- 3) Filming of the Appetite video on board the Tuxedo Princess floating night club on the Tyne River
- 4) Live at Glasgow 'Night Moves' 24 February 1984

What's Going Down at the Stables? Kitchenware: going, going... not gone?



Take your mind back to June 2012, when the first mootings surfaced about the 'demise' of Kitchenware Records. Then it all unfolded when Keith was interviewed, admitting that its days had naturally come to a close. On 28 May 2013 Kitchenware Records received a striking off order from Companies House, but administrative and financial advice agency Scholes & Brown, neighbours at Kitchenware's St. Thomas Street Stables' offices, successfully campaigned a stay of execution, with Kitchenware's next accounts to be returned by 28 February 2014.

Take a look on Kitchenware's website and you will see that the content has been untouched for at least two years. Call the main office telephone number and you will find it has been discontinued. In essence, Kitchenware Records is dormant, but why hold on?

Kitchenware (the record label) has financially experienced several financial troughs in its history. That's what made their 30-year history so remarkable as an independent label. Very soon in their life they experienced major changes to the distribution channels available to small independent labels, with Red Rhino, Rough Trade and others being closed under financial pressures or being swallowed up by the majors. Owning a record label is akin to owning a football club – the prospect of making a modest profit is slim; it is the emotional association and dedication with these organisations that perpetuate their existence. Keith Armstrong created Kitchenware Records not only out of a willingness to help bands and artists to 'get their music out there', but out of a set of values that he held for the people he worked with. Most small labels in the early 1980's survived a few years – many after financing two or three singles. The change in distribution channels and the high costs of set-up for a small label pushed Armstrong seek funding by London Records, CBS, Arista etc. to allow the label to continue, whilst staying true to Kitchenware's values by retaining a sense of artistic ownership.

When Prefab Sprout caught the interest of CBS, focus was set on doing the best for them, as Keith was absolutely sold on the talents of Paddy McAloon. The other young bands on the roster at the time, including Hurrah! and the Daintees were very hurt, feeling somewhat 'sidelined', as all that was promoted up to that point was the 'family thing'. It was a double-edged sword for Kitchenware – die young and be famous for what might have been very short-lived, or adapt to the industry that spits you out if you stand still (unless you have the funding of an oil sheik).

Armstrong's relationship with Paddy McAloon became much more personal after CBS' signing of the band and the association with Muff Winwood – a friendship that had Muff on a train up to Paddy's studio to listen to the original songs that would become Let's Change the World with Music, even after he had retired as an A&R man – brought a great sense of support and encouragement for Paddy, allowing him to focus on his one desire... to write, compose and record great songs.

Fast forward to the 'noughties' and the music industry had changed significantly – long gone are the 8-album deals, the likes that Prefab Sprout attracted in the mid 1980's – anyone with a decent PC or a Mac could create professionally sounding recordings in their own bedroom – high street shops started to migrate away from offering CD's and DVD's and the local record stores became a thing of the past – and distribution channels are even more contracted in the industry, with Amazon and iTunes taking a grip on sales.

2003 saw the disbanding of The Lighthouse Family, one of Kitchenware's biggest acts to date, having made a No.2 album and a string of successful singles. In context, this was when Paddy was putting out I Trawl the Megahertz in his own name, rather than that of Prefab Sprout. Whether it was intentional or not, there is a certain irony in that. Out of contract with CBS/Sony, Keith Armstrong recognised that the only way for Paddy to survive in the music industry as an artist is to write his own material, own his own recordings and sell the 'package' on licence for a fixed period of time. This does mean that each album needs to be packaged and brokered by Keith individually but together, Paddy's name and record for fine songwriting carries such esteem in the industry, along with Keith's creative experience in the music industry, they consistently find solutions to get Paddy's music out there. The one lacking space in all this, to the frustration of many fans, is the poor marketing of the artist – especially for Paddy's albums post-CBS/Sony.

One thing that Kitchenware and Paddy were really missing out on in relation to the older label contracts is the absence of monetary advances. This was taking its toll in 2004, when Kitchenware had a very bad trading year, where accounts were deferred while the company re-grouped. It was a turning point for Keith. Two founding directors had left the company: Paul Ludford, who went on to form a family-owned events management company; and Phil Mitchell, who retired after a life-threatening illness, and took up writing novels.

Keith set about to re-launch a new business with a new team, setting up Soul Kitchens Music (Management) Limited on 28 April 2004, along with Jason Hart (artist management) and Mark Evans (tour management) The SKML stable takes care of the management and publishing of Prefab Sprout, Sirens and Jake Bugg, along with the publishing of Editors, Karima Francis and Cathal Coughlan (of Microdisney fame). Seven years later, the company was valued at £750,000, with Kitchenware being effectively phased out of trading.

By its own nature – and using the analogy of the football 'industry' – a record label will closely consider intangible assets and make adjustments within their accounts accordingly – sometimes to just exist. Kitchenware still exist for three reasons:

- 1) There is an emotional tie to what was – and the values that still pervade within Keith Armstrong
- 2) Between 2004 and 2009, Keith Armstrong has taken out board-approved, interest-free loans of up to £161,000 (in 2012), which still remain and must be refunded on demand – note is made here that Keith has never defaulted on any company mortgages
- 3) The Companies House 'stay of execution' award

And so up to today, with the impending release of The Devil Came a-Calling, and a deal with London-based Icebreaker who have, since 2004 assisted in the production and distribution of nearly 150 music albums from a range of established and aspiring British artists and musicians. Icebreaker form Limited Liability Partnership companies (LLP's), and trade in the licensing, development and exploitation of know how and creative material. To date they have raised over £350 million in capital contributions. The business of each LLP has involved acquiring licences from writers, inventors and other third parties. The LLPs have paid further third parties to exploit these licences, with a view to sharing in the revenue generated from the worldwide distribution of products based on the licences and other commercial arrangements.

But Icebreaker are not stopping here, oh no! In a plan to expand the fan base and educate a younger (18-30 yrs) demographic, Icebreaker and SKML are targeting Internet bloggers to spread the word of the new album, inviting would-be bloggers to a 'listening experience' in London. This is the most pro-active marketing we have seen by Keith in a long time. Let's hope that the advertising and marketing expands beyond this, but it's a great start.

The reason why Paddy McAloon relies and confides with Keith Armstrong is that Keith works in Paddy's personal interest – in accepting that his one desire is to create wonderful pop songs. And the reason why Kitchenware still exists (in name, at least) is because Keith is the creative, inventive entrepreneur he always was and always will be.

As we face the disappointing aftermath of the Souncloud leak, fan forum in-house troll fights and folk cynically criticising Keith Armstrong while at the same time illegally uploading links to listen or illegally download this new material, let's try to stay focused on this wonderful new material by Paddy, 'The Devil Came a-Calling'. Better the devil you know!

p.s. That giant gong at the end of The Devil Came a-Calling – is that a reference to the Japanese giant Sony, do you think?

John Birch

~o~

What's happening to our very own Wendy? Andrea Perry news

The Prefab Sprout Project's Andrea Perry! She just released her 4th solo album, and it's magnificent!

You can check out her new material at iTunes, using the following link:

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/four/id668164521>

There are two reviews there already which suggest it's a good hear:

There is no loading the dishwasher or filing papers while listening to Four the first, second, or third time. Perry commands the listener's attention all the way through the album. Moving and smart lyrics surfacing charming music. How does she do it?

Four is peppy chamber pop laced with darkness, loss and, somehow, hope...not an easy mix to master, but Perry does so with grace and well-placed muscle. It is openly, joyously Beatles-based, but you'll be reminded of Susanna Hoffs, Matthew Sweet, The Banana Splits, XTC, Jellyfish, Elliot Smith, They Might Be Giants, and The Carpenters...yet it is wholly her own. These songs sound like lush, pop standards from another era that you somehow missed the first time around. Don't miss them now.

Musik Express – July 2014 issue (Germany)

Check out the following link, which is a pretty good multi-page feature on Prefab Sprout, but no mention of the new album. Mind you, my Rollmo! Fanzine and The Prefab Sprout Project both get a mention, along with a focus on 'missing albums':

<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/31885321/Music%20Express%20July%202014.zip>

Until the next newsletter...