

NEWSLETTER No.4

APRIL 2012

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?

In this issue:

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Paddy... on some early songs

*Dolby tours, talking Sprout... one day
he will record with Paddy again...*

Update:

Scott McPherson's The Prefab Sprout project is coming along very well. He has five or six tracks now in quite an advanced state. Soon, there will be a Kickstarter campaign opened – see his website at www.ThePrefabSproutProject.com for details – but he's already received over \$800 in pledges. Ex-Avalon bass player Roy McCalvey has also generously pledged 75p! Please keep up to date on Scott's website and keep the pledges coming in – this looks very likely to be an amazing album – due for release, of course, simultaneously with the book!

~o~



Who is Louise Rutkowski?

Louise was one of the sisters that sang in the Glasgow-based group Sunset Gun, once pursued by Kitchenware and Postcard. Paddy McAloon even presented them a demo of Horsin' Around for a possible recording. She was an integral part of the 4AD project This Mortal Coil, with an unmistakable voice.

But what's she doing now?

Well, she's been working with Calum Malcolm, believe it or not. He's been mixing some of her new material. Check out Mimi on YouTube at <http://youtu.be/reeZpbOoJME>

But can you help Louise realise her next project? Read on...

We wanted to let you know about Louise's new album that's in the creation stages. She'll be launching a campaign to raise funds for its completion via Pledge Music and at this stage, she's trying to get awareness raised.

You can download a free track by going to <http://www.louiserutkowski.co.uk/> and clicking on "Download" which you'll see on the home page. That way you will help raise the Facebook numbers! Please support her project.

Here's a link to the widget that is on the Pledge Site that goes to the free track:

<http://www.pledgemusic.com/widgets/2796>

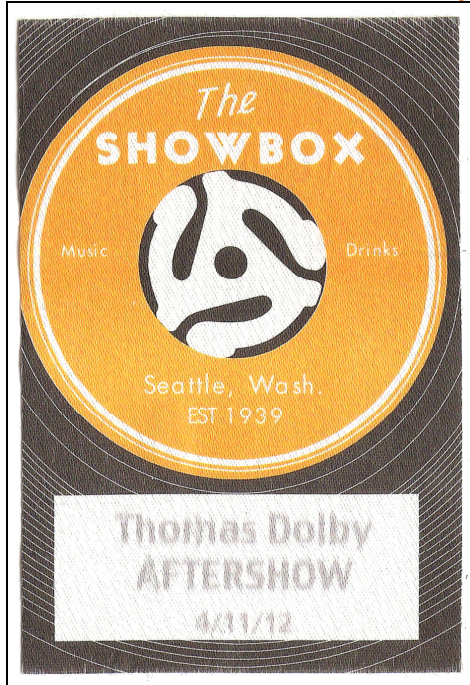
As part of the This Mortal Coil collective, Louise's distinctive voice can be heard on the seminal Filigree & Shadow and Blood albums, and as lead vocalist on The Hope Blister's critically acclaimed 1998 Smile's OK album, all of which were released on the 4AD Records recording label.

Louise also performed in *The Kindness of Strangers*, with Moulin Rouge composer Craig Armstrong who was signed to US label Interscope Records, recording the highly regarded album *Hope*, with tracks produced by the Eurythmics' Dave Stewart and Björk/Madonna cohort Nellee Hooper.

In 2001 she released 6 Songs on her own label, Jock Records, exploring the surreal world of Randy Newman. Choosing to focus on live performance in small theatre settings, having grown tired of the music 'industry' and wishing to re-connect with music itself, the material of Randy Newman provided the ideal platform.

Scott McPherson went to see Thomas Dolby...

The Showbox, Seattle, WA - Wednesday 11th April, 2012



Scott reported, "For me, I was surprised to hear him do *I Scare Myself*, which he mentioned he had been recently invited to play the tune at the 70th birthday party Dan Hicks, who wrote the song. But couldn't make it (touring).

He brought up his opening acts a few times, Aaron Jonah Lewis and Ben Belcher, but one guy was a totally hillbilly – having awesome banjo and violin chops. Lewis (along with cohort Ben Belcher), was discovered by Dolby at an English alternative country music festival and opens for him on this current tour. He played the violin on *I Scare Myself*, as Thomas played an old time (bar) piano sample... very cool.

Thomas also brought up his 15 year old son to play drums on a couple of dad's new songs, which he played quite well.

I really enjoyed his choice of soft synth sounds and samples, just awesome. He of course brought many samples from the original song source, in fact -he had many samples of British scientist and TV presenter Magnus Pyke shouting a variety of "Science" phrases, many I had not heard. And he told stories of how he would chat with Magnus over the years and how he would curse Thomas for having a hit with that song -since every time he would walk down the street someone would come from behind and shout, "SCIENCE!"

He also did a song he had written with Ryuichi Sakamoto ... called *Field Work*. He also cleverly slipped in the theme to *Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence* - as a solo in the middle."

Dolby would continue to spend the evening telling stories and weaving tales of his song's creation, life experiences and technological achievement amidst his music. He would detail the recording of new material, which he completed last year at his personal recording studio. The studio is named 'The Nutmeg of Consolation', and is located in the garden of his North England sea side beach house. It's actually housed within a self contained 1930s lifeboat retrofitted to be powered entirely by renewable energy. "Makes it kind of hard to record on rainy days, but if the oceans rise, I'm all set!" quipped Dolby, soliciting laughter and applause from the crowd.

Several songs from his latest release would comprise the majority of the middle portion of his set. These tunes included *Evil Twin Brother*, *Road to Reno* and *Love is a Loaded Pistol* being especially well received. The highlight of the newer numbers was definitely *The Toad Lickers*. Before the song, the band was joined onstage by Aaron Jonah Lewis on banjo, providing the true bluegrass feel the tune called for.

A stretch of classics and fan favourites would follow in rapid succession with *I Love You Goodbye* and *Europa and the Pirate Twins*, building crescendo of music led up to Dolby's biggest hits to close the show.

Interview with David McGuinness

[Strings arrangements, I Trawl the Megahertz]

Extract from the interview between John Birch and David McGuinness in May 2011...

JB: Calum Malcolm commissioned you to work on the album. Had you ever previously worked on such a project?

DMcG: I think it came up in conversation when we were mixing my group Concerto Caledonia's album Mungrel Stuff. As arranging jobs go it was a little unusual but very interesting.

JB: Describe what it is like to work with Calum.

DMcG: Calum likes to make things sound beautiful, and is very self-deprecating about his considerable talent. He's very calm and slightly nervous at the same time, so his work has a smooth quality but his attention to detail is very acute indeed.

JB: What was the amount of input from Calum in your work? Or did you have free rein, allowing it very much to be your interpretation of Paddy's works?

DMcG: With the arranging, Calum just let me get on with it; and in the session he generously let me get more hands-on with the talkback button as it progressed. I don't think my interpretation came into it at all, I was just trying to faithfully reproduce what Paddy had composed.

JB: Can you describe the process you applied to extract/create the string arrangements from Paddy's demos?

DMcG: Calum sent me the demo version that they'd worked on together, and the MIDI files.

Basically my job was to translate the notes in the MIDI files into something that the musicians could read and follow, and into something that would reproduce with real instruments the harmonic effects that Paddy had made with the samples in the studio. With the short tracks that was a fairly straightforward process, but the long track at the beginning was more of a challenge, as he'd recorded it completely free of metre, with no MIDI time reference. So with that one I sketched it out in pencil from scratch before putting it into Sibelius on the computer. For the others he'd composed all the parts with a mouse, inputting a note at a time, rather than playing them in on a keyboard.

JB: It is said that, certainly as far as the guitar is concerned, Paddy likes to create his own chords. Was this ever evident in his demos?

DMcG: I think there's a harmonic language that's characteristically his, whether it's on guitar, keyboard or a mouse ...

JB: Did you meet the woman that recorded the spoken lyrics on Megahertz? What was her background?

DMcG: No; no idea

JB: As I understand it, it was very much a collaboration, but were the recordings restricted to players taken from within the McFall's Ensemble, or were there other musicians involved? If so, what was their background?

DMcG: Mr McFall's Chamber just provided the strings. I'd produced a couple of albums for them some years previously that Calum had mixed, and I played as a guest with them now and again. Calum and Paddy looked after the other parts with Gerard Presencer and whoever else they needed. Calum had talked about Martin McAloon playing on it too: I don't know why that didn't happen in the end, it may be linked to Paddy's decision not to use the Prefab Sprout name on it.

JB: You said that Paddy had an abundance of material 'sitting under his bed' (these were actually Paddy's words)... would you like to hear more?

DMcG: He did mention that he had tons more similar material: it would be fascinating to hear what sort of character it has.

JB: Once the album was completed, it must have been rather strange to hear it for the first time... did you ever get the feeling that, in hindsight you'd go back and change anything about the arrangements?

DMcG: Well, it would have been nice to record the whole thing with a decent-sized orchestra and replace more of the samples from the demo but we didn't have the budget!

JB: Assuming you still have the original demos, did you ever listen to them with the respective tracks on the finished album to 'compare'? It would be interesting if you could do so on a track or two to describe what was 'added' and/or 'removed' in the process.

DMcG: Not much changed really – the ideas were pretty much complete in the demos, all we did was 'realise' them.

I Trawl the Megahertz

© Paddy McAloon
arr. David McGuinness

A ♩ = c. 96 faster ♩ = c. 112

unison strings + 8ve 3

Violin I *pp* first time, then *mf* >

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello 7th time only
cello solo, 7th and 8th time only espress.

Double bass

...and an extract from Sleeping Rough...

11

cue glock

lost I'll grow a long and silver beard I'll grow a long and silver beard and let it reach my knees

Vln I *mf*

Vln II *mf*

Vla *mf*

Vc. *mf*

"There's a song in my ear... and to add turbulence here... frozen in the blue heights the moment before"

From 'Constant Blue', by Paddy McAloon

Kim Wilde speaks about her love of the Sprouts

We spoke with Kim in May 2011...

Steve McQueen was the first album that turned me onto Prefab Sprout in the early 80's when every music fan acknowledged that we were well and truly blessed to have such a band in our midst! I met the band and Paddy briefly at that time, and seem to remember having a big crush on him... ha ha!... that boyish charm! Of course my brother Ricki and I were happily treading our own 'pure pop' path, but it didn't stop us swooning to their beautiful and unique sound. Songs like Hallelujah, Bonny and Desire As remain etched into my musical vocabulary, and don't get me started on From Langley Park to Memphis, or the sublime Jordan the Comeback (Jesse James Bolero...as exquisite as a snowdrop). Several years ago, whilst on an 80's revival tour, I would drive home late after each gig with I Trawl the Megahertz for company...superb.

"Prefab Sprout's music speaks directly to the heart in a magical and often ethereal way, with melodies that enchant and haunt, and voices that sometimes break your heart. A few weeks ago I went to see Kylie at the O2 and was delighted to hear her sing If You Don't Love Me in her set; I'll bet Paddy LOVES that!"

~ O ~

Thomas Dolby Blog 1/11/2009

A belated note about the latest Prefab Sprout album, 'Let's Change the World With Music', which was released a few weeks ago. It has a curious history. Paddy McAloon wrote the songs at the beginning of the 90s, intending to make a follow-up album to 1990's 'Jordan: The Comeback'. As he liked to do, Paddy made demos of all the songs in his home studio, and sent them both to me and to the band's record company, Sony. I immediately fell in love with the songs, especially 'Ride Home to Jesus' and 'I Love Music.' I was keen to produce them and we'd started to make plans. However Sony's head of A&R, Muff Winwood, who had always been a huge supporter of the Sprouts, was a bit negative about the album, saying that the religious overtones of many of the songs would create a perception of a 'Christian rock' band, which would destroy their credibility and commercial appeal. He was very aware that U2 had narrowly dodged a bullet round about the time of songs like 'Pride (In The Name Of Love)' and 'I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For' when many accused them of veering towards 'God Rock'—even though those titles were referring to something completely different.

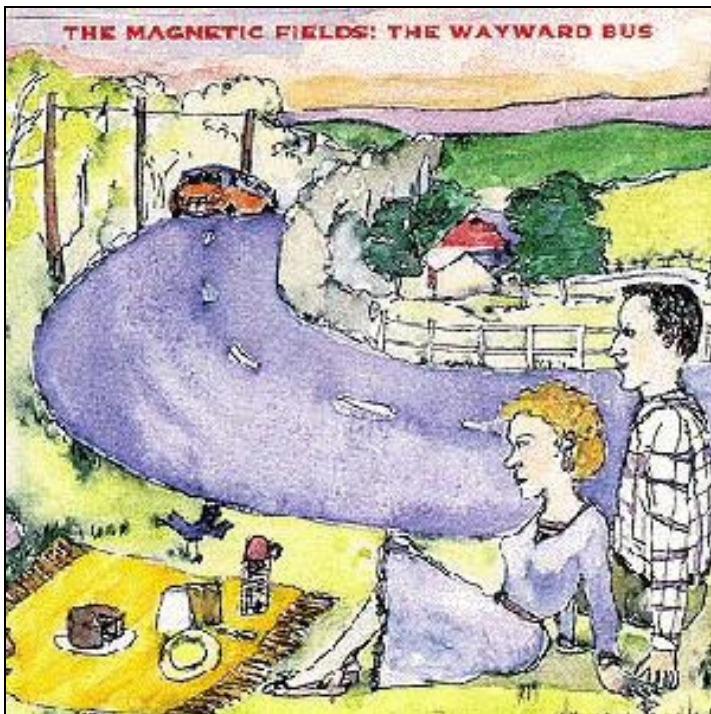
Ultimately it didn't do U2 any harm though, did it? And Paddy's songs were not actually promoting God or religion. If anything they were an analysis of faith and integrity. They seemed to aspire to a love of something above, beyond ourselves. In 'Music Is A Princess', for example, the author characterises himself as a lowly boy in rags, willing to die for Music but unworthy to carry her flag. In 'Ride', Paddy praises people who work thanklessly for the greater good. I thought the songs were excellent, with great chords and melodies, and it was very refreshing to hear some subject matter that wasn't just about sex, relationships, money or starvation. But the band felt unable to deal with the friction caused by the record company's push-back, and Paddy decided to move right on and start from scratch. I believe Muff Winwood has since claimed that he only wanted a few changes to the words and titles and perhaps the addition a couple of extra songs that were not so controversial.

It's easy in retrospect to say that the original decision not to release 'Let's Change the World with Music' did irreparable damage to the band's career. Certainly it threw a spanner in the works, because the next twelve years saw only two more Sprouts albums, neither of which approached the critical or commercial success of their previous four. There were several other song projects that never got off the ground, including a musical about Zorro and an album of Michael Jackson-themed songs. Paddy or his managers at Kitchenware would send me the tapes and I always enjoyed them and was impressed by how good his home studio recordings were becoming.

During those years, which also ushered in the era of Internet music and self-publishing by artists, I repeatedly told Paddy I thought he should ditch his major label contract altogether and just release his stuff himself via the Net. His output was so prolific that he could easily have released two or three albums per year, maintained a great mailing list (his brother Martin having become something of a Web expert), and made a perfectly good living without any interference from A&R men and radio promotion people. But he is quite conservative in his view of the music business, and always felt that success had to include the conventional trimmings of commercial acceptance, like seeing your poster in the window of WH Smiths, getting played on BBC Radio 1, and so on. He's perfectly entitled to cling to that view. In this day and age though, what's survived of the Industry star machinery is reserved for celebrity-hungry 20-something hotties that can sing, dance and disrobe like world champs. Paddy's health is not good and he's in no mood to be out there under the spotlights, so perhaps now he will reconsider my suggestion and make some new music to release softly on the Internet for the legions of devoted Sprouts fans to enjoy.

A couple of years ago Keith Armstrong, the Sprouts' manager, talked Paddy into the idea of reviving 'Let's Change the World with Music' and releasing it independently. With the help of engineer Calum Michael, Paddy cleaned up the recordings and replaced a few parts, though he stuck with the original vocals. It's a pretty sweet-sounding record. Of course, I feel it would have been even better if the mainly programmed backing could have been replaced Martin, Wendy Smith and Neil Conti, and the whole package produced by me. After all it's been billed as a Prefab Sprout album, not a solo project like Paddy's beautiful 'I Trawl the Megahertz.' But this release needed to be swift and the costs kept low. One of the challenges of the new music business landscape is how to pull off a project that requires several musicians and expensive recording studios, without going heavily into debt with a label who will then demand their pound of flesh in return. There's not really a new system in place for compensating musicians and producers without incurring the huge ridiculous costs of accounting and royalty calculations.

Still, what we're left with is a gorgeous piece of work. I'm really glad it saw the light of day, and hope that its warm reception from fans and critics alike will encourage Paddy to do some new work, despite the problems he's having with his hearing and eyesight. If you want to feel inspired, just read his sleeve notes, about Brian Wilson and 'The yawning caves of blue.' He's a brilliant writer and would make a fine novelist. There's a very candid interview with him transcribed here which explains the album much better than I can. Do seek it out if you can. I notice it's not on iTunes for some reason but it is on Amazon.



Design by Wendy Smith – arty or farty? You be the judge.



Virginia Astley, keyboards on the 1984 tour

Paddy... on some early songs

Lions in My Own Garden (Exit Someone)

"I like playing around with songs and titles. 'Lions' was written about my girlfriend being away at university in Limoges. I just saw the word Limoges written down on an envelope and tried to see what kind of phrase I could make from the letters. One of my best phrases became the title of the song...which might not mean anything literally, but it does convey the sense of someone leaving and another person being vulnerable as a result of that. I hope that doesn't sound too clever-clever, because I still think it is quite an easy song." NME August 27, 1983

Walk On

"'Walk On' is '76; 'Lions' is '81, that's very recent for us...I don't do any pre-76 now, it's too embarrassing." Aforesaid, "early" 'Walk On' has bits of Arabic on it; Paddy says it's about "the consolation of pop music when you're young, doing exams, listening to pop music, and ending up in your own little world." 'The Militia Have Arrived,' Kitchenware promo flier, 1984

Don't Sing

"A lot of songs I wrote when I would think, that's a good idea for a song--'Don't Sing,' Grahame Greene, Mexico, Catholicism, blah, blah. That, in the pop world, makes you literary, because you've read a book and want people to know it by dropping all the names. In other people I would find it intolerable. I let myself get away with it because the music and overall effect is usually OK. But as a general rule, I would outlaw that now." NME, May 4, 1985

Technique

"'Technique' is absolutely spot on! It HAS technique, structure within it you see! It's about a guy who wants to work at Jodrell Bank, a star-gazer who knows he probably never will. Anyway, this chap realizes he has more passion than anyone who actually works at Jodrell Bank and that makes him more powerful than any one of them put together (sic)." 'The Militia Have Arrived,' Kitchenware promo flier, 1984

Diana

"I'm proud of 'Diana,' I have to say that...It's about the deification of a girl. It's really about the Daily Mail, the way they wrote about Lady Diana Spencer. The burden she had. Don't you think it's funny and ironical that she has the virgin goddesses' name, when what she represents is motherhood, the perfect mother?" 'The Militia have Arrived,' Kitchenware promo flier, 1984

When Love Breaks Down

"It is a very personal song. It's not that far removed from personal experience. I've worked so hard, it's been to the detriment of other things. Relationships have suffered, I don't mind saying that. But I know if I don't work hard I won't get that golden moment. I know I can go even further but to do that I have to narrow down my interests." Melody Maker, June 1, 1985

Goodbye Lucille No.1

Magazine article: "History gets murky here, [when the Sprouts first started] but there was a plan to write an entire album with the same title for each song, the completely different tunes and subjects to be differentiated by numbers. The only worthwhile result was Goodbye Lucille No. 1 which later appeared on Steve McQueen." (unsure of magazine source)

Faron Young

"I know that kind of vigour isn't normally associated with us, so that should surprise some people...as for America, I'm not preoccupied with it all. The first LP probably had too many references to it, I know, but 'Faron Young' is really sending up that country's clichés." (unsure of magazine source)

"This shows you how stupid I am--it's a song wondering why people like Country & Western Music when they live in the industrial north. I thought 'why do they listen to all these things about cowboys and farmers and grain?' and then 20 years later, I suddenly think, 'It's because C&W deals with real emotions.' Take that!" NME, June 20, 1992

When the Angels

"I wanted to talk about somebody dying young with a wonderful gift. The main thing on my mind then was Marvin Gaye. I couldn't be sombre and serious like the 'Nightshift' thing. I wanted to be irreverent and put two fingers up at the sky." Melody Maker, June 1, 1985

Appetite

"It was a song about a girl who got pregnant, and the idea of her calling the kid after her lust for life. Thomas Dolby never thought he did justice to that song." Epic promo flier, 1995

Moving the River

"Yes, that line [from 'Moving the River'] comes from the time when Paddy and I worked in a petrol station. An old gentleman used to come in and tell us the easiest way to make money was to become a bookie, 'Money for jam, John, its money for jam.'" It just became a catchphrase between the two of us." This is actually from Martin; Connect, 1988/89

Nero the Zero

"It's one we used to play live when we played in tiny pubs in Durham, where we come from. We went into a local studio in Newcastle for a couple days and banged down six songs real quick, pretty much live with few embellishments. I wrote 'Nero the Zero' when I was 18 or 19, and it has a funny lyric, actually about playing in Durham." Creem (date unknown)

Photos over the ages...

