



ALDORA BRITAIN RECORDS

The Global Independent and Underground Music e-Zine
Issue 136, Friday 1st December 2023
“Tomorrow’s Music Today”

FEATURING THE SOUNDS OF...

Eddie Japan, The Breed, Cheryl Lynn Tomblin,
The Drain on the Balcony, Bence Vas, Super
High Right Now, Adam Camm, Ryan Chrys and
the Rough Cuts, This Circus Life, and Kiko and
the Blues Refugees

Compiled and written by Tom Hilton

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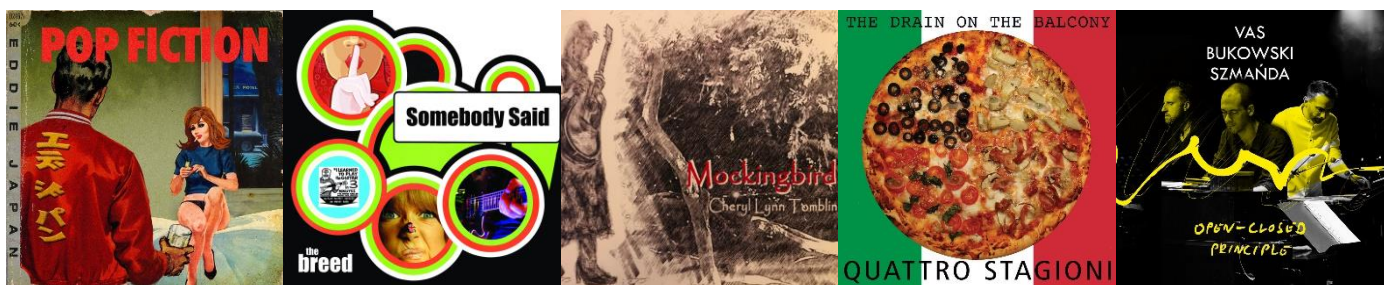


“We all deserve a chance to join in the dance...”

Jacob Tucker, Grey Star Ghost

Highlight of the Day

This week's 'best of', the 'greatest hits' package. Our featured artists discuss origin stories, their influences, the sounds of tomorrow, and much, much more.



David Santos, Eddie Japan: *"As someone who writes songs, I am fascinated by the fact that almost every modern pop song is constructed around three or four chords with different melodies to distinguish between verse and chorus."*

Wayne Crisp, The Breed: *"The Breed has had a number of lineup changes over the years, but for as long as I can remember I have always had the concept of The Breed and what sort of music it would play."*

Cheryl Lynn Tomblin, solo artist and PIPES: *"I wouldn't say that I'm out to shock with the type of music that I make, but I also don't want to fit into some mould of what people might think my music should sound like because I'm this black woman."*

Gary, The Drain on the Balcony: *"We are writing from the perspective of being in our late fifties and sixties. Therefore, more songs about death and dying, mortality, frailty. There is a darker tone to some of the lyrics and more pessimism and cynicism."*

Bence Vas, composer: *"I am trying to decide about the structure at the very beginning. To build up a composition like a painting, a drawing, or even a sculpture. Starting with the big, empty canvas."*

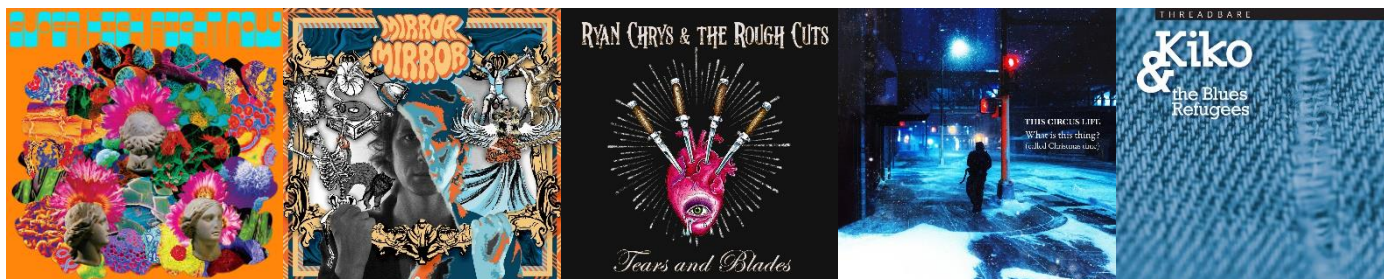
Rick Meissner, Super High Right Now: *"I hear in these songs either a loss of or a longing for connection. The connection with one another, with the Earth, and with our soul's purpose. We wanted to get this music out to connect to the greater world."*

Adam Camm, solo artist: *"As I grew older, I understood the style aspect more, the theatricality as you put it, and I think anything you indulge in at a young age comes through in later life."*

Ryan Chrys, Ryan Chrys and the Rough Cuts: *"Something about an old Western story put into a three-minute song is something I love, and it's not that easy to do. I just try to grab at inspiration whenever it drifts through my mind."*

Charlie Mear, This Circus Life: *"I then went through a very challenging seven year period ... I started writing songs as an outlet to deal with it all. After a year or so, I was quite happy with how the songs were sounding so I formed a band around it all."*

Kiko Pereira, Kiko and the Blues Refugees: *"I usually have the song in my head when we start, but I'm totally open to mistakes and blunders. They're like messages from your unconscious self or the muse ... got to be ready to listen."*



The Beat Goes On

Aldora Britain Records remembers these musical icons and legends in this issue. Throwbacks from Dire Straits, Bachman-Turner Overdrive, and The Script are on the jukebox. A life in service to rock and roll, thank you for the music.

Jack Sonni



Robbie Bachman



Mark Sheehan



The Pull of the Moon

Boston-based innovators **EDDIE JAPAN** have a gift for pulling listeners into their cinematic pop stratosphere. This American seven-piece have an unquestionable talent for theatricality within the alternative rock and roll arena. With icons such as Iggy Pop and Roxy Music in mind, this glorious ensemble has most recently unveiled a quintessential offering in the form of their *Pop Fiction* LP, featuring such brilliant tiles as 'Time Machine', 'Walk Away', 'Summer Hair', and more. The band's authenticity and credibility are given an added boost by the endorsement of Greg Hawkes, a founding member of The Cars, who also appears on the album. All in all, Eddie Japan are truly becoming a glamorous pop institution, with all the pomp and flair to cement this status. As the momentum and acclaim surrounding *Pop Fiction* continues to steadily build, David Santos, an old friend of *Aldora Britain Records*, and a steadfast member of the Eddie Japan universe, took some time out to delve deeper on some of the band's most recent activities. We discuss early musical memories, the initial spark behind the group, the road to *Pop Fiction*, and much, much more.

Eddie Japan have previously contributed their track 'Edward Descending' to our 'New Music for a New Decade' compilation. Listen or download [HERE](#).

If you enjoy this content, please consider making a small, magazine-sized donation at the following link: <https://paypal.me/aldorabritainrecords>. Thank you!

Aldora Britain Records: Hello David, how are you? I think it is about time that we welcomed Eddie Japan back to the *Aldora Britain Records* e-Zine. It has been far, far too long. Did you know the last time was in 2020? As always, I want to kick things off by travelling back in time. Let's go all the way to the very beginning. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what was it that first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

David Santos: Some of my earliest musical memories are playing the 45s that my parents had. Singles like 'Yesterday' by The Beatles, 'I Am a Rock' by Simon and Garfunkel, and 'Windy' by The Association. I feel like that early exposure may have influenced my melodic sense. I took up drums at the age of twelve, but after seeing U2 perform for the first time, I knew I wanted to be a singer.



“I think the original members were interested because I wanted to do something different than what one might expect from a Boston band.”

Aldora Britain Records: And now, let’s take a leap forward. In all our interviews to date, I don’t recall ever asking you much about the beginnings of Eddie Japan. Let’s right this wrong! The early days of the band must have been such an exciting and invigorating time. How did it all come to be? How did you meet the other members and what was the initial spark that brought you all together on a musical level?

David Santos: I started the band with Chris Barrett, a trumpet player and multi-instrumentalist from Boston. At the time, I was listening to lots of orchestral pop and didn’t want to form a guitar band per se. I wanted the lead instrument to be trumpet. Chris introduced me to other musicians who became the first incarnation of Eddie Japan. I think the original members were interested because I wanted to do something different than what one might expect from a Boston band. Our sound has evolved since then, as has our lineup, but I think we’ve retained the cinematic qualities that first inspired me, and there is still a sonic cohesion between the past and present.

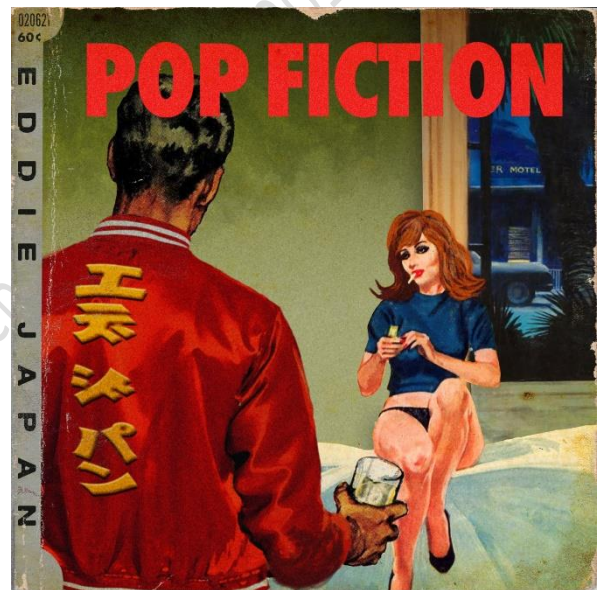
Aldora Britain Records: In April 2023, you unleashed a barnstorming full-length album in the form of the brilliantly titled *Pop Fiction*. This is almost definitely the quintessential Eddie Japan offering to date. We need to chat about it! What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing this collection of tunes, and how would you say you have grown and evolved as a band since your previous outings?

David Santos: This record sort of fulfilled the initial impetus behind the name Eddie Japan. A long while back, when I was between bands, I had the idea of doing a glam inspired concept record with some sort of character in the vein of *Ziggy Stardust*. I came up with the character Eddie Japan but never did anything with it until the band needed a name. But the idea of turning Eddie Japan into a character was always in the back of my mind. The song ‘The Dandy of Suburbia’ was the beginning of the creation of the character Edward Japan. In 2019, we released the EP *The Amorous Adventures of Edward Japan*, and the plan was to release a second EP fairly quickly that was part two of the story. The pandemic altered those plans, so we ended up recording six more songs and adding them to the five on *Amorous Adventures* for a full-length. *Pop Fiction* was different for us as it was all recorded and produced in-house by our guitarist Eric Brosius. Many of the songs were never played live until well after they were recorded, which isn’t how we’ve typically operated.

Aldora Britain Records: It is such a strong LP from start to finish, top to bottom, but I would like to pick out two personal favourites. Let’s go for ‘Walk Away’ and ‘Time Machine’. I believe the latter features a very special guest! For each, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer?

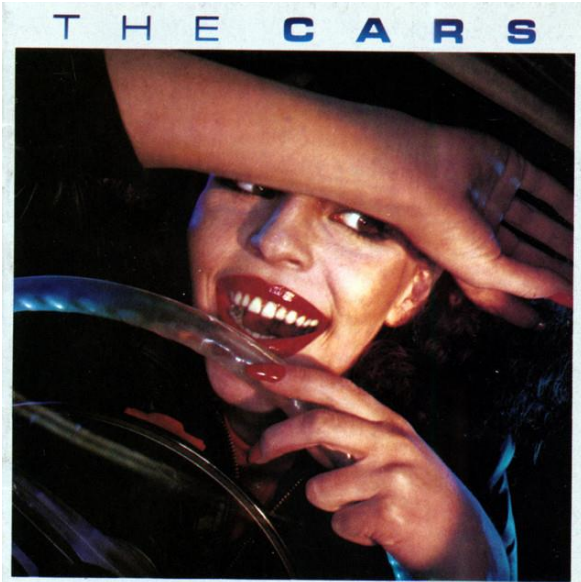
David Santos: Thank you! ‘Walk Away’ started as something of an exercise. When I first sat down to write it, ‘Blinding Lights’ by The Weeknd was all over the place, and I loved the melody and the very distinct 80s rhythm. As someone who writes songs, I am fascinated by the fact that almost every modern pop song is constructed around three or four chords with different melodies to distinguish between verse and chorus and bridge. It amazes me that they are able to wring out so many hooks over the same chords. So, I set out to write a song like that. It was initially going to be sung by Emily alone, but as I was tinkering with it, The Jesus and Mary Chain song with Hope Sandoval, ‘Sometimes Always’, came to mind and I felt there was the opportunity for Emily and I to sing our first true duet.

‘Time Machine’ was a piece of music that I had in my pocket for a long time. When we were considering ideas for this record, Eric dug out a rehearsal recording of us messing with it several years back and suggested we give it another try.



“As someone who writes songs, I am fascinated by the fact that almost every modern pop song is constructed around three or four chords with different melodies to distinguish between verse and chorus and bridge.”

It had the title ‘Time Machine’ but no real lyrical idea beyond a few stray lines, so I had to make it fit into the story of the record, which wasn’t too hard. As the song took shape, it developed this retro-futuristic style for which we felt Greg Hawkes’ keyboards would be perfect. It was incredibly exciting to have Greg play on ‘Time Machine’ and ‘I Can’t Wait’.



Aldora Britain Records: Last time we spoke, you namechecked The Cars’ debut as your favourite record of all time. You also have a fairly close relationship with that band these days. Can you remember the first time that you heard this particular album? What impact would you say that it has had on you as an artist and a songwriter? More broadly, who are some of Eddie Japan’s big influences and inspirations currently?

David Santos: I remember hearing the singles as a young kid, but I probably didn’t really dig into the full record until high school. It was a staple in all of our cassette decks back then. I’d say the record has probably had more of an impact on me now because we are actually playing the songs with Greg. Those songs are so well constructed, hugely melodic, and interesting. So, when I write, that influence is quite present. The Cars really only played what needed to be played, so that sense of editing is very much on my

mind as I am writing these days. Influence-wise, there are seven of us in Eddie Japan, so there is a lot to draw from. My bandmates are all much more musically adventurous than I am, so I often learn about new music from them. As the main songwriter, I’m lucky that they are always able to take their own influences and apply it to what we do. As we gear up to make new music, I have been listening to folks like The Beatles, especially *The White Album*, Queens of the Stone Age, Arctic Monkeys, and Lana Del Rey.

Aldora Britain Records: Previously, if we travel back to 2017, you unveiled another Eddie Japan masterclass in the form of *Golden Age*. I still look back on this record very fondly. There is so much going on, ten tracks of cinematic pop gold! Thank you for the music. How do you reflect on this particular LP as a whole now, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

David Santos: This past summer, we revisited all the songs on *Golden Age* because we had a show at which we played it from start to finish. We all remarked how well the record has held up and that we were all proud of it six years later. But yeah, there are small things we would change if we could go back. When we play two of the songs live now, there are small sections that we remove. Chop a chorus in half, lose a solo. Again, that sense of editing is one of the more important things to be aware of in the studio.

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad? I am curious to hear your insights.

David Santos: I might still be processing the pandemic, and I often still feel amazed that we made it through. I remember our first gig back in the summer of 2021 with Greg Hawkes outdoors on a very hot summer evening. We were playing ‘Drive’ and I remember looking up at the sky and getting a bit teary. I was so relieved and thankful that we were actually back doing what we loved. So, that time really made me more grateful. If anything good came out

“I might still be processing the pandemic, and I often still feel amazed that we made it through ... I was so relieved and thankful that we were actually back doing what we loved ... that time really made me more grateful.”

of it for the music industry, I guess it would be that musicians quickly figured out different ways to persevere. So many seemed to get right to work and employ creative ways to keep going in some fashion. And I think some of those ideas have changed how musicians can operate, like doing livestreams. The bad is that we lost many great people in the music world and so many venues closed. I think that time period will impact our new material, but I'm not quite sure how at this point. As I said, still processing.

Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **David:** David Bowie.

AB Records: Favourite album? **David:** *In Times New Roman*, Queens of the Stone Age, current favourite.

AB Records: First gig as an audience member? **David:** Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

AB Records: Loudest gig as an audience member? **David:** Dinosaur Jr.

AB Records: Style icon? **David:** Bryan Ferry.

AB Records: Favourite film? **David:** *A Single Man*.

AB Records: Favourite TV show? **David:** *The Great British Baking Show*.

AB Records: Favourite underground artist? **David:** Iggy Pop.



Ring-Ring Bang-Bang

An era of mania and crazed fandom. This is the golden age that Hobart's **THE BREED** resurrect with a primal and raw spirit. Influenced by the timeless sounds of Merseybeat, 60s rhythm and blues, and old-fashioned pop, this Australian combo bring a fun and joyous edge back to contemporary music. Whilst their songs may be beat-driven or shining bright with harmony, Wayne Crisp and his compatriots are not afraid to touch on more serious underlying topics. That is undoubtedly the beauty of The Breed. *Somebody Said*, their most recent LP, arrived in 2022, boasting fourteen glistening garage pop cuts with all the gusto and panache to convert audiences in their droves. This is another brilliantly executed chapter in the storied history of The Breed, more than ably standing alongside 2019's *Pop Song*, 2016's *Play My Game*, 2012's *That Life*, and more. With fresh music in the works, bandleader Wayne took a brief respite to once again reflect with *Aldora Britain Records* on his life in music so far. We discuss the group's beginnings, the *Somebody Said* LP, favourite original compositions, and much, much more. That conversation is published here in full for the very first time.

The Breed have previously contributed their track 'Pop Song' to our 'Rock and Roll Song' compilation. Listen or download [HERE](#).

If you enjoy this content, please consider making a small, magazine-sized donation at the following link: <https://paypal.me/aldorabritainrecords>. Thank you!

Aldora Britain Records: Hello Wayne, how are you? I think it is about time that we welcomed you back to the *Aldora Britain Records* e-Zine. It has been too long! Did you know the last time was way back in 2020? As always, I want to kick things off today by stepping inside the time machine. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what was it that first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

Wayne Crisp: Hi Tom, it's great to be talking with you again. Growing up, we always had commercial radio on at home during the day, so I was exposed to pop music from an early age. When I was in primary school, my parents insisted that I learn a musical instrument because it would be good for me, and as it turned out they were right! When I was in high school, I had a holiday job and that gave me some income of my own. One day, I was looking around the local shops, and I saw the album *The Beatles Greatest Hits Volume 1*, an Australian only release, and decided to buy it. The next day, I went back to the same record store and bought *The Beatles Greatest Hits Volume 2*. These albums together gave a good snapshot of The Beatles' recording career from 1962 to 1965 and I was hooked on the sound.

Aldora Britain Records: And now, let's shuffle things along to Tasmania's premier beat group. The beginnings and early days must have been such an invigorating time. Previously, you spoke about your love of mid-60s pop culture being a huge instigator. How did you meet the other members and what was the initial spark that brought you together?



“The Breed has had a number of lineup changes over the years, but for as long as I can remember I have always had the concept of The Breed and what sort of music it would play.”

Wayne Crisp: The Breed has had a number of lineup changes over the years, but for as long as I can remember I have always had the concept of The Breed and what sort of music it would play. With the previous band that I was in breaking up, the time was right for The Breed. I had known bassist Steve through songwriting collaborator Allan Knight and was aware that he had moved to Hobart and wasn't currently in a band. He was also very theatrical. In his time with The Breed, he came up with the 'Exploding Bass Amp' and the 'Confetti Canon'. I had known of drummer John for a number of years with bands we were in playing on the same bill. I had also played at his wedding! As it turned out, he was also not in a band. So, the lineup was formed. Initially, we were also after a lead singer, so I could concentrate on guitar, but couldn't find the right person, so we decided we would go ahead as a three-piece. As members have moved on, replacements have generally been found through word of mouth, someone who knows someone, etcetera.

Aldora Britain Records: Recently, it has been a time of change for the band. What does the future now hold in the world of The Breed?

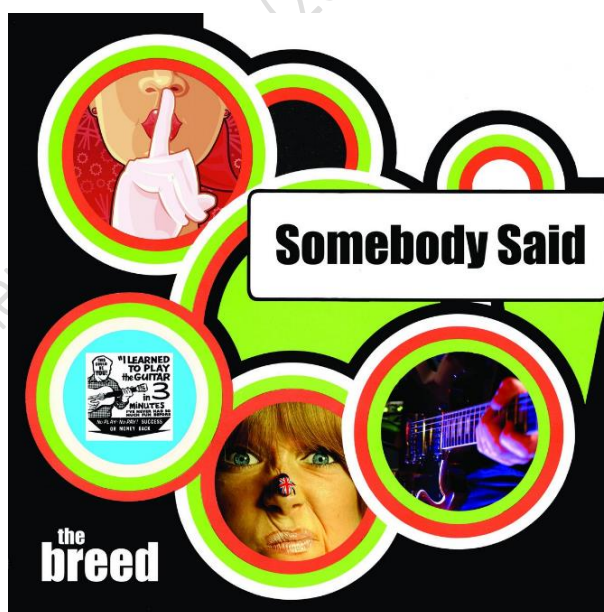
Wayne Crisp: Yes, definitely some major changes for The Breed. Firstly, with the death of long-term songwriting collaborator and friend Allan Knight, and then more recently the sudden death of The Breed's current bass player Rodney Garlick. Since then, we have played a few gigs as a two-piece. This has been either us as an unplugged set with acoustic guitar and a cut down drumkit, or by playing to a backing track on which I had pre-recorded the bass guitar parts. We have also used a stand-in bass player, but we are still on the lookout for a longer term bass player.

I have also been working on some recording projects. Firstly, with a new album tentatively called *My Music and My Secrets*. This album will consist of some of the last songs that Allan and I were working on. This will probably be ready for release by the end of 2024. Secondly, I am looking at a remix and release of The Breed's first album *Regeneration* on vinyl with bonus tracks. The bonus tracks are of The Breed that we recorded live at the local ABC Radio studio about the same time of the original release of the *Regeneration* CD. The ABC is the Australian equivalent of the BBC in the UK.

Aldora Britain Records: Your most recent outing as a band came in 2022 with the release of the impeccable *Somebody Said* LP. This is an album that I still revisit often, thank you for the music. The Breed's back-catalogue continues to blossom, absolutely fabulous stuff! What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing this set, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

Wayne Crisp: Thanks for the praise. The *Somebody Said* album was The Breed's COVID-19 period project. With lockdown periods, venues being closed, and public gatherings very limited or non-existent, it was the perfect opportunity to work on an album, especially since everything could be done in my own little recording studio at home. I already had the song 'Somebody Said' recorded, my personal favourite, and knew this would also be a perfect title for the album. Then it was just a matter of pulling together songs that Allan and I were currently working on. We'd both give each other homework to do.

Aldora Britain Records: As I have said, this album really is an impeccable set from start to finish, top to bottom, but I would like to pick out two personal favourites. Let's go for 'Tell Me Queenie' and 'Jenny-Lee'. For each, what is the

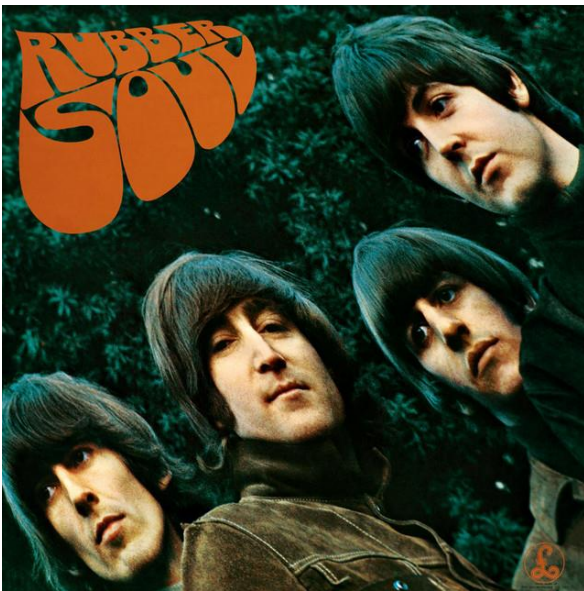


“I like anything in the powerpop category with the emphasis on a solid beat, a memorable tune, and some good harmonies.”

story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer?

Wayne Crisp: ‘Tell Me Queenie’ was a partial song that I had for some time. Allan provided some more verses and some extra lines to the original. This resulted in a slight change to the tune I had written. I still felt the song sounded a bit ordinary, but I sent a rough demo to our drummer Ken, and he came up with the ‘Bo Diddley beat’ on the song and then it all magically came together. I added a slide guitar break, and we had the finished arrangement. ‘Jenny-Lee’, Allan sent me the lyrics to his sad tale about Jenny Lee. As far as I know, it’s a fictitious story. The music fell into place very quickly around the keyboard riff with no adjustments needed to the lyrics that he had come up with.

The song on the album that has the most meaning for me is ‘The Poet and the Minstrel’. It’s about the songwriting collaboration I had with Allan. This has been made more personal following his death. I’ve always felt self-conscious about singing this because it is written from the point of the poet, the person who writes the lyrics. And in our case, the lyrics have mostly been written by Allan.



Aldora Britain Records: I would like to focus on The Breed’s sound and your approach to making music. In all our interviews to date, you have mentioned one Beatles album in particular, *Rubber Soul*, of course! Can you remember discovering this record for the first time? What impact would you say this LP has had on you, both as a human and as an artist? More broadly, who are some of your other influences and inspirations currently?

Wayne Crisp: I never really bought albums by The Beatles in any particular order. The only plan I had was to eventually have all their major releases. I initially bought a copy of *Rubber Soul* as my next Beatles album because of the cover. I think the cover art and the music of an album need to work together, and I was not disappointed with *Rubber Soul*. In fact, I have often bought a lot of records on the basis of the cover art. I found *Rubber Soul* was a solid mix of pop, soul, pre-psychedelia, rock, and folk with the

songs having more complex arrangements than their earlier work. This progression continued with the *Revolver* album. To me, both albums represent something to aspire to musically. Personally, I think these two albums are The Beatles at the peak of their creative ability. More broadly, I like anything in the powerpop category with the emphasis on a solid beat, a memorable tune, and some good harmonies.

Aldora Britain Records: Over ten years ago now, you released a set called *That Life*. I have actually only just discovered this record. I was recently doing some digging over on Bandcamp, and I found myself playing this album on repeat! A brilliant earlier snapshot of the band. How do you reflect back on this release as a whole now, and how would you say you have grown and evolved as a group since?

Wayne Crisp: When The Breed did their first album, *Regeneration*, the band was set up in the studio and drums, bass guitar, and rhythm guitar were all recorded at the same time, with overdubs of vocals, keyboards, and some extra guitar parts. With the second album, *That Life*, everything was recorded separately. Firstly, the rhythm guitar was recorded with a click track. A guide vocal track was added and then everything else was recorded individually. I think this resulted in some of the songs sounding quite busy because of too many individual tracks being added to a song. If I was to remix this album, I would probably get rid of some of the overdubs. The whole recording process of this album was a good learning experience, and this helped greatly with the next album which was *Play My Game*. I think

“It is far easier for a band or an individual to record and release their own music as an independent artist, thanks to the internet and sites like Bandcamp. You now have potential access to the whole world.”

The Breed are a band who knows their style and sticks to it, always ready to entertain with their unique blends of 60s pop and rock, Merseybeat, Mod, R&B, and powerpop.

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad? I am curious to hear your insights.

Wayne Crisp: We are getting into the deep and meaningful questions here. I think there are both good and bad things. It is far easier for a band or an individual to record and release their own music as an independent artist, thanks to the internet and sites like Bandcamp. You now have potential access to the whole world. The cost of having your own recording setup has dramatically reduced and continues to reduce. The minimum you need is a laptop, a good microphone, and the right recording software and you are off and running. However, all this doesn't mean you'll be making any substantial income from your music.

The big record companies still control the music industry, so it is hard for independent artists to break through into the mainstream. Payments to independent artists from platforms like Spotify and iTunes have reduced, with most of the money being directed to mainstream record companies and artists. The number of live music venues available to bands has also reduced. Venue owners are not willing to pay reasonable performance fees to artists, and the general population are not going out as much as they once did. These issues have all contributed in making it financially harder to be a full-time musician.



Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Wayne:** The Beatles.

AB Records: Favourite album? **Wayne:** *Rubber Soul* by The Beatles, of course! This album would have been made even better if it had included their single at the time, which was 'Day Tripper' with 'We Can Work It Out'.

AB Records: First gig as an audience member? **Wayne:** Farewell gig for local Hobart band Beethoven before they moved to Melbourne to try and make it nationally.

AB Records: Loudest gig as an audience member? **Wayne:** New York punk band the Ramones.

AB Records: Style icon? **Wayne:** Paul Weller when he was with The Jam.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Wayne:** *To Sir, With Love*, 1967.

AB Records: Favourite TV show? **Wayne:** Present day, *Death in Paradise*. 1960s, *The Prisoner*.

AB Records: Favourite underground artist? **Wayne:** Dada Paradox. Self-described as progressive retro pop, lo-fi guitar pop, and rock with psychedelic and folkish tendencies. They are currently based in Oxford, UK.

Weight in Gold

From the diverse community of Berwyn, Illinois, powerful singer-songwriter **CHERYL LYNN TOMBLIN** steps forth. With an unforgettable and commanding voice, her passion and enthusiasm shine, captured gloriously on her most exceptional offering to date, 2019's *Mockingbird*. Throughout this eight-track set, Cheryl explores her blues roots, grungy alternative tendencies, and folk storytelling prowess. It is a resplendent, richly textured melting pot of sonic and lyrical charm, a fantastic glimpse into this American artist's creative mind. Previously, Cheryl has plied her trade as a member of PIPES, a project that was hailed as dark, poignant, melancholy, and noir with 'smoky vocal undertones'. Sets including *Allow Me the Pleasure* from 2012 snapshot this group's prowess and connectivity fantastically. Taking a break from her current artistic pursuits, Cheryl had an in-depth chat with *Aldora Britain Records* about her musical voyage to date. We discuss her work with PIPES, the *Mockingbird* record, favourite original compositions, and much, much more. That conversation is published in full here for the very first time.

Cheryl Lynn Tomblin has previously contributed her track 'Weight in Gold' to our 'Amazing Production Sounds' compilation. Listen or download [HERE](#).

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Aldora Britain Records: Hello Cheryl, how are you? I am excited to be talking with such a passionate songwriter from over in Illinois. It is amazing how music brings us together. Let's start off by rewinding the clocks. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what was it that first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

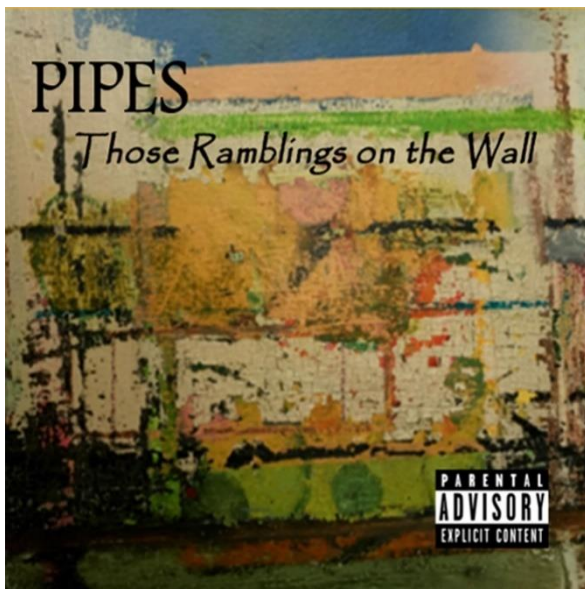
Cheryl Lynn Tomblin: Hi Tom! Thanks so much for this interview. I'm so excited as well! So, my earliest experiences with music came from my family and me raiding all of their music collections. My mom and my dad were into soul and R&B. My parents were divorced but I still ended up managing to see what my dad was up to musically, which was a lot of James Brown. And then my mom was heavy into gospel, like CeCe Winans. And then there were singers like Teddy Pendergrass and Luther Vandross, and randomly Boz Scaggs, who I still listen to, he's great! My siblings, my two sisters and my brother, were into everything else. So, that could be from your hip hop and rap like Digable Planets and Wu-Tang and A Tribe Called Quest, to industrial like Nine Inch Nails, Ministry, Lords of Acid, KMFDM. And then your Goth music like Depeche Mode and The Cure and everything else that could possibly fall in between there. So, my palette was pretty large when I got into music.



“They have the freedom to create around the bones of my songs. I hardly ever present a new song to them saying that I want them to play a specific line. It’s more of a groove.”

My sister December had this huge music collection because she used to work at a music store. I remember listening to Tori Amos’ *Under the Pink* for the first time and just dancing in the basement for hours to that album because it’s so beautiful. I also remember finally being introduced to Alice in Chains by my brother Randy, he listened to them a lot. Layne Staley’s vocals and Jerry Cantrell and his guitar work just sucked us in. I also got a hold of the *Core* from Stone Temple Pilots. I played that album almost every day for months when I heard it. I was maybe around ten years old. Scott Weiland was this musical creature that had such an allure. I loved his vocals. I loved the composition of the songs. And even though I was way too young for the lyrical content, I loved that too. And I think that was around the first time when I was like, ‘I might want to do this...’.

I then got my first guitar when I was seventeen. I was already playing an instrument at that time, violin. I started playing when I was ten. I liked it, still do, and I still play. But guitar gave me another way of expressing myself. And with that guitar, and all that music going through my head from all my favourite musicians, I began to write.



Aldora Britain Records: And now, let’s take a leap forward to your fabulous PIPES project. This came about in the early 2010s. It must have been an invigorating time. How did it all come together? What was the initial spark? Is it another outlet for your solo musings or more of a kind of collective approach to the music?

Cheryl Lynn Tomblin: Tom, you are so good. You do your research. Yeah, so PIPES was a band name that I created. I shouldn’t say band, it’s a project name that I created. Actually, it was created while I was on this date with this guy. We were sitting in a coffeeshop in Chicago called New Wave and I was telling him about my music and wanting to start collaborating with people. I had my original band name when I started playing out in like 2009 or so and it was called Confectioner’s Affliction. That’s the very first band that I had, and I think there’s only one YouTube video that’s up with that band name. It was too long though, too hard for

people to remember, so I needed something shorter. We’re sitting there, we’re chatting, and we’re having coffee, and we’re looking up at these beams. The pipes were still exposed in the coffeeshop, and we’re like, ‘What about Pipes?’. I liked it and it fit. When people would ask me what my band name was after they’d hear me play, they’d think it was so fitting because of my vocals. The smoky vocals. ‘You got pipes!’, ha! I’m glad that it came together.

So, the original members of PIPES are me of course, David Walker, and Ryan Shepard. We all met through local Chicago open mics. I would frequent them throughout the week just to see who is out there, workshop my songs, and all that good stuff. I love open mics because of getting a chance to meet people you can collaborate with. David and I really gelled when it came to musical sensibilities. I still remember the first time when I heard him. He’s a jazz guitarist but probably one of the most unique I’ve heard. He has these Primus-like whimsies that are like, ‘What?’, incredible! But yeah, when I heard him play, I was like, ‘Wow, he’s good!’, and then he heard my songs, and he’s like, ‘I want to do some stuff on top of that!’. I was like, ‘Yeah, let’s do it!’, and so that was the beginning of that, and we’ve been playing together now for like fifteen years. Ryan has also been in the mix for about that long. Ryan and I were in another band together years ago and when that band split, we continued to play together, and he got onboard for PIPES.

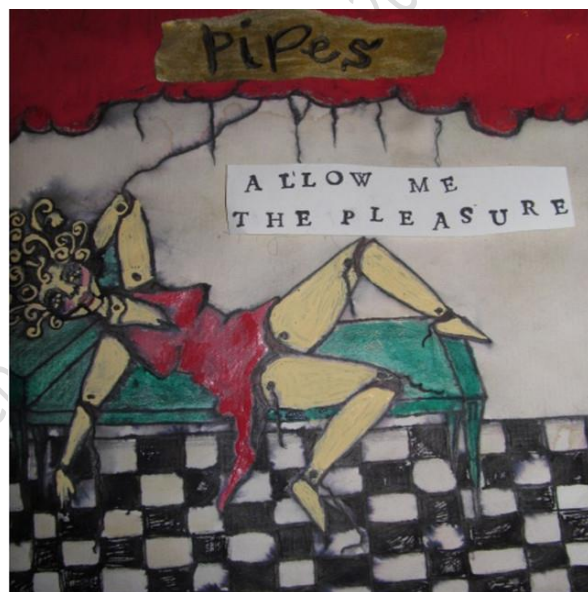
I’ve had people come in and out of the group and we have some accessory members like Joe Fournier who plays baritone sax when he’s available. It’s fantastic and I love when he’s able to join us. We also have the pleasure of having Mike Kraniac on bass, he’s wonderful. So, when we perform, it could be a three to five-piece. They have the freedom

“I’m taking some chances to be vulnerable with my writing ... and it’s kind of unnerving to do that. But it’s also very freeing ... I go where the song takes me.”

to create around the bones of my songs. I hardly ever present a new song to them saying that I want them to play a specific line. It’s more of a groove. I prefer to just see what happens. And then the creative process starts, and the song just usually comes together. There are a few that have changed over the years but usually that’s because my guitar skills have improved, and I needed to up my game. When we first got into the studio for *Those Ramblings on the Wall*, that was a very new experience to be able to bring that type of life to my songs, considering the first EP *Allow Me the Pleasure* was just solo with only one track with bass, provided by Bill Kavanaugh who recorded that EP. But the PIPES sound is what it is because of this cast of characters that put on the show.

Aldora Britain Records: You released a record in 2012 called *Allow Me the Pleasure*, a fine snapshot of PIPES in all their glory. Thank you for the music. I still really enjoy these songs, for sure! How do you reflect back on this record as a whole now, and how would you say you have grown and evolved as an artist since?

Cheryl Lynn Tomblin: Honestly, out of all of my releases, *Allow Me the Pleasure* is probably my favourite. It’s my first baby. My labour of love. I had to put it together myself because I ran into a deadline that I wasn’t going to be able to get the CD cover duplicated in enough time. I have a good friend, Charlie Otto, a force of nature and one of my favourite musicians that I have the pleasure of knowing, who had a CD duplicating machine in his apartment, and he’s like, ‘Just come over and do it!’. So, we made like fifty to seventy-five CDs and I handstitched about twenty-five of the albums with needle and thread and it had this little puppet that came inside. It was insane, I gave birth to that album! It’s my darling and I will always hold it dear. I have a new album that I’m currently working on. It won’t be ready for another couple years or so, while I’m finishing school, but while I’m waiting to get into the studio, I will be cultivating the songs. I will be sending you a copy, Tom!



As far as what I write about, I have always kind of been an observer and reflector of life, but I feel like more of my songs are heart-on-the-sleeve. I’m taking some chances to be vulnerable with my writing, which I hardly ever do, and it’s kind of unnerving to do that. But it’s also very freeing and I’ve had a lot of good feedback from shows. I feel like this is a good path that I’m on as far as how people are receiving the music. In some ways, I feel like I’m going back to the simpler times and stripping a lot of the songs down. But in the end, I go where the song takes me.

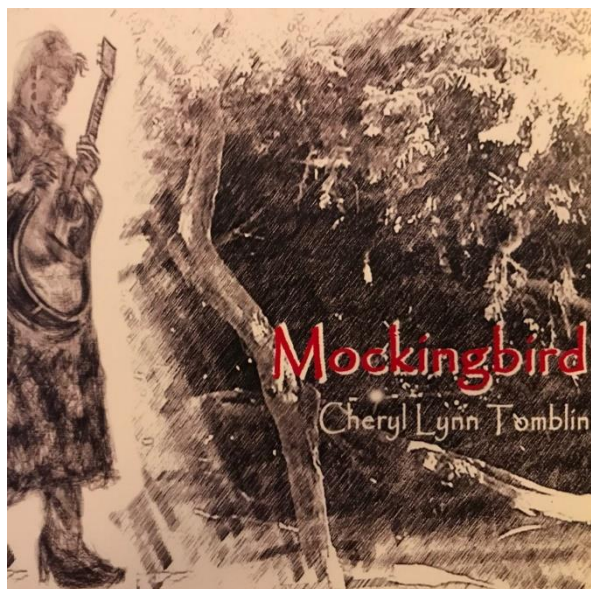
Aldora Britain Records: In late 2019, you released a stellar solo album entitled *Mockingbird*. Such a beautiful title, and the songs within definitely live up to expectations too! It is another pearl from you. What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing this set, and is there anything that you would edit with the benefit of hindsight?

Cheryl Lynn Tomblin: *Mockingbird* was a really great experience, a new one for me because I did not play guitar on this album. Simone Galdeli, who is based out of London, is an acquaintance from social media and I heard his guitar playing from the technique courses he offered on Instagram. I really liked what he was doing and asked him about playing on my project. I sent him demos of the tracks I wanted on the *Mockingbird* album, and he ended up recreating the guitar parts and adding some of his own flair. He sent me tracks to review, and then ported the finalised parts over to Packy Lundholm at Sound Vault Studios here in Chicago. Singing over guitar that I wasn’t playing was kind of like being on a tightrope without a net, in a way, but it definitely helped to train my sense of timing and trusting another person to carry the melody. My friend Ryan Joseph Anderson lent his talents on this album and played lead guitar, and Fournier is doing baritone sax.

“I chose these songs because I’ve wanted to put them out into the world. Most of them I’ve played with PIPES but for this album I wanted to give them new life.”

I chose these songs because I’ve wanted to put them out into the world. Most of them I’ve played with PIPES but for this album I wanted to give them new life. I really love all the songs on *Mockingbird*. But still, eventually, I want to do something else with them because there’s still so much room for them to evolve. You asked if there was anything I would change... not really. I think if anything, maybe doing the guitar myself instead of having Simone. But that is really only for liner note purposes, so that people listening aren’t like, ‘Oh, she’s not a guitar player, she’s just a vocalist...’, or whatever. I’m like, ‘No! I actually do play guitar!’. I think that would be the only thing that I would change on there, but I can’t really think of too many other things because sonically I like the way it sounds. I’m thankful for everyone involved on that album. Packy did a great job mixing and Brian Zeiske at Off Axis Audio, who mastered *Allow Me the Pleasure*, always does excellent work. No complaints and I’m so glad you enjoy listening to it, Tom!

Aldora Britain Records: I would like to pick out two personal favourites from this album. Let’s go for ‘Choir Boy Sins (Good as Dead)’ and ‘Weight in Gold’. For each, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer?



Cheryl Lynn Tomblin: Wow, that is such a great question and I wish that I could actually remember what was happening in my life when writing both those songs! I have a feeling that I was kind of wrapped up in the soundtrack of *The Walking Dead* or something else along those lines. Maybe *True Detective*. There’s a musician named Jamie N Commons whose voice and songwriting I really like, and I feel I definitely borrowed some of his stylings for ‘Weight in Gold’. One of Commons’ songs is featured on the soundtrack of *The Walking Dead* and that’s how I found out about him. He’s great.

I think ‘Choir Boy Sins’ came about from me coming across the word ‘genuflect’ and me ruminating on that particular action. Sometimes that’s all I need, a word or an image, to bring a song to fruition. And then it was the idea of the choirboy, this young lad that is in the church going through all the motions that one would go through for that. But, you know, he ends up following a chosen path, for better or worse, doing whatever he does in his life and makes choices based on that, sometimes to a bitter end. It makes me think about artists out there that have passed, like Chris Cornell. He was one of my favourite vocalists and I think I read that he was once a choirboy. May he rest in peace. He had one of the most amazing voices I’ve ever heard, and I think about him when I sing it sometimes. ‘Choir Boy Sins’ is a tale of reckoning. We all go through it in some way, shape or form.

‘Weight in Gold’ was written in the same vein, that you make these choices, and you acquire these things, but it’s really your character that is your gold and what you have to own up to. How people are going to see you in the end is based on the things that you do with your life, not the things that you have. These two songs seem to resonate with people. Tom Jackson at Chicago’s WLUW has played ‘Weight in Gold’ a number of times on his radio station and I’m very thankful to all the Toms of the world for sharing my music!

Aldora Britain Records: As you well know by now, I am a big fan of the Cheryl Lynn Tomblin sound and your approach to making music. Alternative, post-grunge, bluesy, Americana. It is all in there. How would you say this style of yours came about, what goes into it for you, and who are some of your biggest influences and inspirations?

Cheryl Lynn Tomblin: I think my sound sounds like everything because I listen to everything. The music that I like, in general, is dark and moody but that’s not all I listen to. There are some up-tempo things that I like as well, like Harry

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Nilsson and Paul Simon. There’s this excellent album my friend Shawn Rios of MIIRRORS turned me onto recently by Alison Sudol, I really like her sensibilities. But I feel like a lot of my songwriting settles in kind of this murky, dark, lo-fi type of vibe. My most favourite vocalist, lyricist, and bassist is Monique Ortiz. She is in a few bands. Bourbon Princess, A.K.A.C.O.D., and Alien Knife Fight. She’s amazing. Ortiz has this deep tenor voice that just settles across the bones. I first came across her like fifteen years ago, maybe more. I have a poor concept of time these days. If you haven’t heard of any of her projects, definitely check them out. She has such a craft at what she does, and she is so humble about what she does but she’s extraordinary. I’m thankful for musicians and artists like her that have inspired me to do what I do.

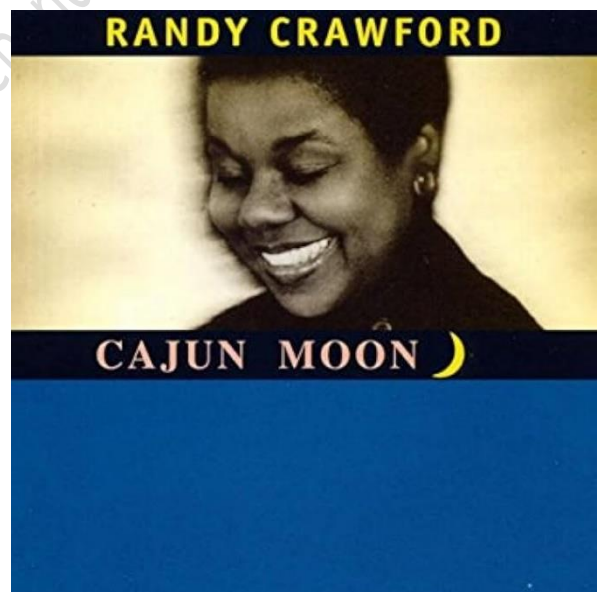
Other influences... my influences go anywhere from punk to classical. I’m really into this band called The Gun Club. They are no longer, but it is really excellent music and I like this band in particular because they tried everything, you know, as far as their sound and didn’t shy away from anything in particular. PJ Harvey is another one who’s like that and has had a big influence over my musical life. She has gone from like this dark sultry vixen to this kind of whimsical fairy mother of the woods. I really appreciate the artistry that she offers and not being pigeonholed into one thing. As far as female frontwomen, Alison Mosshart. Loved her in The Dead Weather and she’s a big influence of mine vocally. I feel that if I weren’t behind the guitar, I would definitely hone into her performance style.

Earlier influences, some of which I mentioned, are Stone Temple Pilots, Alice in Chains, Radiohead, absolutely Tori Amos. I love soundtracks, and Thomas Newman, who composed the scores for *Road to Perdition*, *Meet Joe Black*, and *American Beauty*, is a huge influence of mine when it comes to creating a mood for a song. Randy Crawford sang this version of ‘Cajun Moon’ that I heard when I was little, listening to the radio, probably V103 or WGCI, and it’s always stuck with me. Her vibe went against the grain of a lot of stuff that was out there. Especially, in my opinion, the music black women might have been expected to make.

I wouldn’t say that I’m out to shock with the type of music that I make, but I also don’t want to fit into some mould of what people might think my music should sound like because I’m this black woman. When it comes to black musicians who I feel embody that idea of nonconformity, and who continue to inspire me to keep making music, there’s Nina Simone, Elizabeth Cotten, Tracy Chapman of course, Cassandra Wilson. Cassandra Wilson has this delicious way of singing and I definitely tap into her style when I’m on the mic. So, so, so many influences and they all go into my cauldron of creativity.

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad?

Cheryl Lynn Tomblin: This is a big question. I feel like the way people respond to music these days is very different. I’m old school and so I feel like the way that I promote myself, even though I do use social media and things like that, is still very grassroots mentality-wise, still very word of mouth. I’m still that person that’s like, ‘Oh, did you hear this band? Let me tell you about them!’. I’m not jumping on the bandwagon just because of popularity. It has to be good to me. And this is not to discredit artists that are out there that are getting a lot of hype because people jump on that



“I’m not jumping on the bandwagon just because of popularity. It has to be good to me.”

bandwagon of popularity. It’s just weird, you know, what people gravitate to. I feel that it leaves these other artists and their craft behind because all of the eyes are on this other hot thing. I guess it’s always been that way, but there’s something different now, and I feel like with the pandemic and people becoming a little more isolated, a little more insular, wanting to gravitate to the internet more, there’s even more of this tendency to flock to whatever is popular, no matter the artistry. But it is what it is.

I did create music during the pandemic and actually had some time to build a home studio and decided to test out the waters and dabbled in different soundscapes. My industrial influences like Nine Inch Nails, Front 242. These bands and Chicago’s Ministry had a big influence on my development as a kid and I wanted to tap into that part of me and the pandemic. I was scared and upset, and my normal songwriting style needed more. Because I was in lockdown with my kiddo, I had some downtime, so I took advantage of it. Now I don’t have much downtime these days. I’m at full throttle because I’m juggling being a mom, working, currently in school, and still trying to nurture my creative endeavours as an artist. It’s a lot. For 2024, I won’t be playing as many shows, but I will be focussing on my next album. I have some really amazing people that have offered to help me with this album and I’m so excited to get started on it. You will definitely get a copy and you can tell me what you think.

Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Cheryl:** Just one? Monique Ortiz. Going with my gut!

AB Records: Favourite album? **Cheryl:** *Amnesiac* by Radiohead, even after all these years.

AB Records: First gig as an audience member? **Cheryl:** Twisted 5, got to see Garbage and Soul Coughing!

AB Records: Loudest gig as an audience member? **Cheryl:** Ha! Recently, Pink Frost at The Hideout. It was amazing!

AB Records: Style icon? **Cheryl:** So many! Alison Mosshart, PJ Harvey, Monique Ortiz, Nina Simone.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Cheryl:** A tie between *High Fidelity* and *Meet Joe Black*.

AB Records: Favourite TV show? **Cheryl:** *Walking Dead*, *Mindhunter*, and *True Detective*. Great music supervisors!

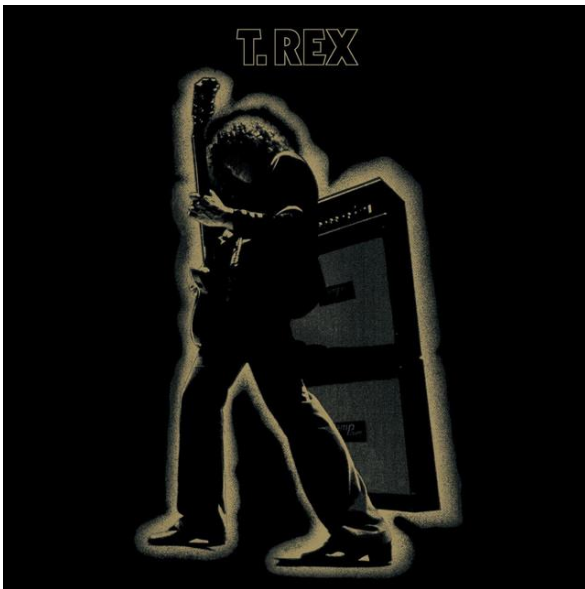
AB Records: Favourite underground artist? **Cheryl:** A.K.A.C.O.D.



A Short History of Modern Britain

Having initially formed in the volatile climate of 1977, **THE DRAIN ON THE BALCONY** have endured ever since, with several years of hiatus for good measure. Having triumphed over a dizzying stream of fads and trends, this band remain true to their indie rock and post-punk roots. With a sonic palette that touches on the glam of T. Rex, the gloom of Joy Division, and the complete abandon of The Velvet Underground, this Solihull institution has created a feeling of incendiary sonic brilliance. This freshly uncooked and brilliantly original sound has been committed to tape in recent years, producing such underground gems as 2012's *Drainwaves*, 2020's *Greetings from Solihull*, and more. With the band's fifth album, *Quattro Stagioni*, for which they have teamed up with Greek label Old Bad Habits, to be released imminently, The Drain on the Balcony allowed for a brief respite to chat with *Aldora Britain Records* about their rollercoaster ride so far. We discuss a selection of the group's recorded output, their long overdue comeback, favourite original compositions, and much, much more. That conversation is published here in full for the very time.

If you enjoy this content, please consider making a small, magazine-sized donation at the following link: <https://paypal.me/aldorabritainrecords>. Thank you!



Aldora Britain Records: Hello guys, how are you? I am excited to be talking to the creative masterminds behind The Drain on the Balcony. Thank you for your time! Let's start off by rewinding the clocks. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what was it that first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

Gary: Listening to my parents' 45s on their Dansette record player. 'Can't Buy Me Love' by The Beatles, 'Satisfaction' by Rolling Stones, 'Candy Man' by The Tremeloes, 'Move It' by Cliff Richard and the Shadows, and many more. Punk rock inspired me to play guitar. I used to really like progressive rock bands, but they were way too good as musicians for me to even think about beginning to play. Then the ethos of punk, learning three chords and forming a band, opened the door. My dad said he would buy me a guitar if I could learn some chords on the school guitar. I met the requirements. I got an acoustic guitar, learnt C, F, G, and met Rucker and Martin at

a youth club. They were having a T. Rex day where they would play all Bolan's albums at Martin's house. I went round, we decided to form a band. 'One Inch Rock' by T. Rex had the three chords I knew and that was the first ever song that we played together.

Gordon: For me, I had two much older sisters, one a Stones fan and one a Beatles fan. Plus, I loved *The Monkees* on the TV when I was seven. Then it was Bowie, Roxy Music, and T. Rex, so I probably had glam tendencies. All that ends in a real love of the three minute song, which Elvis Costello just cemented.

Rucker: I loved pop music from a very early age. It was an escape from the mundane triviality of real life. I remember hearing 'Ride a White Swan' by T. Rex on the radio. I was ten years old. It blew my mind. The following year I saved my pocket money and rushed out to buy the *Electric Warrior* album when it came out. Still one of my top ten albums.

Aldora Britain Records: And now, let's take a leap forward to 1977. The beginnings and early days of The Drain on the Balcony must have been such an invigorating time, what an iconic era to form a band too! How did it all come to be? How did you meet the other members and what was the initial spark that brought you all together musically?

“We were inspired by the punk ethos that you didn’t have to be a great musician to have fun and make music. I found ‘super bands’ like Led Zeppelin and Genesis intimidating musically.”

Gordon: We knew each other from school and youth club, and I guess we were all getting into playing music. We were inspired by the punk ethos that you didn’t have to be a great musician to have fun and make music. I found ‘super bands’ like Led Zeppelin and Genesis intimidating musically and much preferred more basic stuff, though I never lost a love of melodic music. Elvis Costello was and remains a huge influence for me.

Rocker: In 1977, I discovered John Peel’s late night show, the only place on UK radio where you could hear the explosion of DIY punk records. He played ‘The Medium Was Tedium’ by The Desperate Bicycles with the lyric, ‘If you can understand, go and join a band!’. That changed my life.

Aldora Britain Records: You released your debut album, thirty-five years in the making, in March 2012. The brilliant *Drainwaves*! This was also my introduction to your music, so it holds a special place in my collection. Thank you for it! How do you reflect on this release now, and how would you say you have grown and evolved since then?

Gary: In fact, we released two cassette albums back in the late 70s and early 80s. It was these songs that we recorded again in 2012. When we all reached the age of fifty, we thought it would be a good idea to go over our old catalogue and reimagine or reproduce them again. We enjoyed it so much that we were inspired to begin writing new material. A couple of those songs appear on *Drainwaves*, many more on *The Dark Side of the Drain*, and *Golden Hour of Drain*, the third album, has all original material. We are all better players now than we were back in the 70s. We are writing from the perspective of being in our late fifties and sixties. Therefore, more songs about death and dying, mortality, frailty. There is a darker tone to some of the lyrics and more pessimism and cynicism.

Gordon: That first album was very much a reworking of our old stuff with just a few originals. I still love it and listen to it a fair amount. I love the song ‘Drainwaves’. It still makes me shiver when I remember how happy I was that we had got back together again.

Rocker: The band had drifted apart in the early 1980s, when we all left our native Solihull, and had boring stuff happening like jobs and families. We met up again at a reunion party in 2010 and decided that since I now had a recording studio in my kitchen, we should try to record better versions of our old songs than the very lo-fi cassette recordings from the early 1980s. I think the album is great, although with my producer’s hat on, I think the musicianship and production on our newer albums is getting better all the time.

Aldora Britain Records: The second album came in double quick time. *The Dark Side of the Drain* arrived in August 2012. It is a fine cross section of your style and sound as a band. How would you say this came about, what goes into it for you, and who are some of your biggest influences and inspirations as a group?

Gary: The band that has most inspired my writing is The Velvet Underground. One of the songs on *The Dark Side of the Drain* was written in response to the massacre of Norwegian teenagers by a lone gunman at a political camp on an island off Norway. The refrain, ‘Come on out, I’ll take good care of you’, were the words that the gunman said to the young teenagers when they were in hiding. They came out and he shot them. ‘The Sun Goes Down’ is about searching for that which is lost. ‘Looking Down from the Rooftops’ is about a rooftop gunman picking and choosing targets on the high street. ‘Over the Top’ is one of our earliest songs, inspired by school studies of the First World War and the



“We are writing from the perspective of being in our late fifties and sixties. Therefore, more songs about death and dying, mortality, frailty. There is a darker tone to some of the lyrics and more pessimism and cynicism.”

sense of inevitable death when the soldiers left their trenches to advance on the enemy. A lot of dark lyrics on *The Dark Side of the Drain*. Writing these songs is a good way of expressing some of the darker perspectives on life that I have.

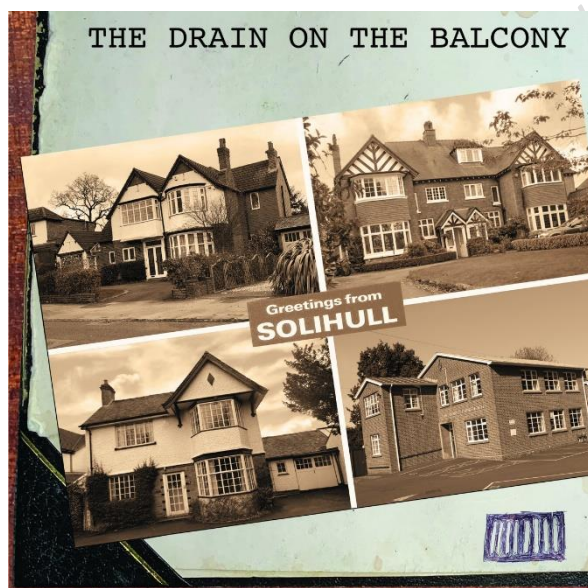
Gordon: The burst of energy and enthusiasm that followed the reunion led us through to a quick second album. We all have different influences, with some overlap. The other guys are more influenced by pure punk. I was more new wave like Elvis Costello, Blondie, Dave Edmunds, then the ska bands.

Rocker: The *Dark Side* album was the first one where our newly written songs outnumbered the older songs. We were finding our feet as something more than just a rehash of stuff we did in the 1970s and 1980s.

Aldora Britain Records: In 2016, you went on to release a comeback compilation in the form of *Solihull Sampler*. I have only just discovered this outing, but it is definitely a great snapshot of the band. What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing it, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

Gary: Rocker decided to put out a sampler of our material in advance of a gig we were going to do. It comprised of some previous material off the first couple of albums, a couple of covers that we did for compilation albums, and a rough mix of ‘Padlocks of Love’, which appeared on *Greetings from Solihull*. The cover is a picture that I took of a group of friends who used to meet up in Mell Square shopping precinct in Solihull after school. It was partly the inspiration for the words of ‘Square’, which was a nostalgic look back at lost youth. I wouldn’t see the album as part of our main canon of albums.

Gordon: I never regret our stuff, though sometimes I would like to do new versions of my own songs as we are getting better with time.



Aldora Britain Records: *Greetings from Solihull* came next. I would like to pick out two personal favourites from this record. Let’s go for ‘Truly Madly Deeply’ and ‘Absinthe Ice Cream’. For each, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer?

Gary: Well, I’m pleased that you like ‘Truly Madly Deeply’ and ‘Absinthe Ice Cream’. ‘Truly Madly Deeply’ is about someone in love with someone unobtainable and not knowing what on Earth they are going to do about the love they have for that person. It used to have more lyrics, but they were deemed too soppy by the other members of the band, and it became the minimalist song that it is. I try to sound like Lou Reed on the vocals. Clearly, I failed, of course. ‘Absinthe Ice Cream’ was inspired by a visit to Prague. There was a shop that was selling absinthe flavoured ice cream and

that stuck with me. I didn’t try any though, sadly. The song was written around the time of Donald Trump’s presidency in the US and there was a lot of conjecture on what was truth and what was lies and false news. This led to the line, ‘Why believe the truth when there are so many lies to trust?’.

Gordon: Of all our albums, this is the one on which I have the least fingerprint. I was super busy and travelling a lot and didn’t write much music between 2015 and 2020. That’s all changed now! I still love the album and enjoyed what I did on it. This was a big album for Gary.

“Writing these songs is a good way of expressing some of the darker perspectives on life that I have.”

Rocker: *Greetings from Solihull* was our fourth album, and I think the overall sound and production is an improvement on the earlier ones. The opening track is ‘Truly Madly Deeply’, which was written by Gary. We tried a few different ways of recording it as a fairly laidback acoustic song, but it didn’t seem to quite work. I tried speeding it up, but there seemed to be too many words to fit in. In the end, I just erased every other line of Gary’s vocals and beefed it up in the style of The Modern Lovers. Martin added the Farfisa solo, and we had a single! My friend Vasilis at Old Bad Habits Label in Athens, Greece offered to release it, so it ended up being the first Drain release to come out on vinyl. It was followed soon after by the vinyl album, which I released on my Local Underground label. Our fifth album is called *Quattro Stagioni* and will be released in early 2024 on vinyl, courtesy of Old Bad Habits Label, and on CD on Local Underground.

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad? I am interested to hear your thoughts.

Gary: Sadly, for me, I have not been able to write a proper new song since 2020. Almost all of the songs on our fifth album, *Quattro Stagioni*, to be released in the new year, and the future sixth album, have been written by the other members of the band. I’ve enjoyed playing bass for all the songs though. Thankfully Rocker and Martin have continued to come up with great songs, and Gordon has become a fountain of new songs. This has been really good for the band because he writes very differently to the rest of us and has given us a bit of a fresh sound, but still in the inimitable Drain style. All four of us write very differently and I think that is a good thing for the variety of styles on the albums.

Gordon: Our next album, *Quattro Stagioni*, is our most political yet. Rocker and I in particular were really furious about Brexit, then COVID denial, and then just the sheer dishonesty of the government. That comes over loud and clear. Most of the material for our sixth album is already in preparation. We may get two out next year. That is more reflective, ageing is a life process worthy of songs as much as any other. I have written a lot more on *Quattro Stagioni* and even more on the as yet unnamed sixth album. We have all improved as musicians. It doesn’t make me want to cover ‘Stairway to Heaven’, but it does make me want to try some new things.

Rocker: In turbulent times, I find music to be both an escape and a way to channel frustrations. As Gordon intimated, our next album *Quattro Stagioni* includes some political songs. Opener ‘Tears of Rage (A Song for Europe)’ expresses my feelings of anger and helplessness at the way lies, backed by money and IT, were used to influence people to vote against their own interests and tear the UK apart from its nearest neighbours and the biggest trading bloc in the world.

One of the most pernicious changes since the coming of online and digitally shared music has been the complete devaluation of music. Artists and songwriters are now simply seen as ‘content providers’, to be fobbed off with \$0.003 per Spotify play, while that company’s executives ‘earn’ six figure salaries. New artists and small bands cannot hope to make a living from streaming revenues. Since the death of John Peel in 2004, there has been virtually nowhere on UK national radio that unknown artists can get their music played. In 2006, a bunch of likeminded people, including myself, formed an online radio station to do just that. Named after Peel’s record label, Dandelion Radio is available worldwide as a free and advert-free stream.



Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Gary:** If pushed to say, then The Velvet Underground. **Gordon:** Elvis Costello. **Martin:** Marc Bolan. **Rocker:** The Velvet Underground or Joy Division.

AB Records: Favourite album? **Gary:** Velvet Underground, *1969 Live*. **Gordon:** Too many to pick out one. Varies from time to time. **Martin:** *Ziggy Stardust*. **Rocker:** Can't narrow it down to one, so T. Rex's *Electric Warrior*, Ramones' self-titled, The Undertones' self-titled, Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures*, Joy Division's *Closer*, *The Explosive Little Richard*, Bowie's *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, The Velvet Underground's third album, The Velvet Underground's *1969 Live*, Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

AB Records: First gig as an audience member? **Gary:** Can't remember, but most awe-inspiring gig that I ever saw was Pere Ubu and The Pop Group at Barbarella's in Birmingham. **Gordon:** Electric Light Orchestra at Birmingham Town Hall, circa 1973. **Martin:** Hawkwind, *Space Ritual* tour. **Rocker:** Possibly the same ELO gig that Gordon attended. Steve Gibbons Band was the support, and thus the first live band I saw. Local hero Jasper Carrott came onstage with ELO to be presented with a gold disc for his 'Funky Moped' single. ELO were his uncredited backing band on the record.

AB Records: Loudest gig as an audience member? **Gary:** Easy one this. Magazine and Bauhaus at the Factory in Manchester. **Gordon:** The Who at the Rainbow, 1979. **Martin:** Probably Deep Purple. **Rocker:** Not sure Gary and I have ever had this conversation before. Mine was Magazine at Bristol Trinity Hall, probably on the same tour. My ears rang for days afterwards... and they have never rung again since!

AB Records: Style icon? **Gary:** None. **Gordon:** Have you seen how I dress? Hardly! **Martin:** Either one of The Flowerpot Men. **Rocker:** The bloke off the 70s advert for Black Magic chocolates.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Gary:** *Apocalypse Now* or *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*. **Gordon:** *Local Hero* with *Gregory's Girl* a close second, just ahead of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. **Martin:** *Local Hero*. **Rocker:** *Casablanca*, *Life of Brian*, *Control*.

AB Records: Favourite TV show? **Gary:** So many, probably *The West Wing*. **Gordon:** Recently? *Succession*, how to make a compelling drama about unmitigated bastards! **Martin:** *Detectorists*. **Rocker:** *Thunderbirds* or *Twin Peaks*.

AB Records: Favourite underground artist? **Gary:** Matthew Halsall, spiritual jazz. **Gordon:** Ourselves! **Martin:** Rocker or Rodriguez a.k.a. Sugar Man. **Rocker:** This week, Burial or Paul Rooney. It changes every day!



Overture at Late Afternoon

Jazz is a stylistic approach that transcends borders and boundaries. It pushes limits, is open to experimentation and avant-garde impulses, and its free-flowing nature is fantastically sophisticated. An artist that embodies these attributes is Hungarian composer and musician **BENCE VAS**, now based in Poland. Through his musical output, this modern day innovator imagines brilliantly abstract soundscapes, blending the lines between big band, neo-classical, and contemporary jazz stylings. This endlessly creative feeling has been captured on two exceptional releases in recent years. Firstly, in 2020, with a Big Band release called *Overture Et Al.*, and secondly, in 2022, with the collaborative outing of *Open-Closed Principle*. These offerings provide a glistening snapshot of Bence Vas and his compositional abilities. Taking a break from further creative musings, this Hungarian genius chatted with *Aldora Britain Records* about his time in the world of jazz to date. We discuss his collaboration with Bukowski and Szmanda, popular original compositions, the impact of the COVID pandemic, and much, much more. That conversation is published here in full for the very first time.

Bence Vas and Big Band have previously contributed their track 'Overture' to our 'Dear Nicola...' compilation. Listen or download [HERE](#).

If you enjoy this content, please consider making a small, magazine-sized donation at the following link: <https://paypal.me/aldorabritainrecords>. Thank you!

Aldora Britain Records: Hello Bence, how are you? I am excited to be talking to such an innovative artist from over in Poland. It is amazing how music can bring us together! Let's start off by travelling back in time. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what was it that first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

Bence Vas: I am originally from Hungary. I only moved to Poland four years ago. My strongest early musical memories are from the time when I started learning the piano by myself. At the very beginning, I did not have a teacher. I applied for basic classical music education only when I was able to read the simple scores and I knew the basic chord structures. It meant that I could skip some of the material at school, and if I remember correctly, I managed to finish the material of six years in only four years. I can't really remember why I started, but I can recall that from the very beginning I tried to compose little pieces and also tried to improvise a little, without knowing actually how to do it.



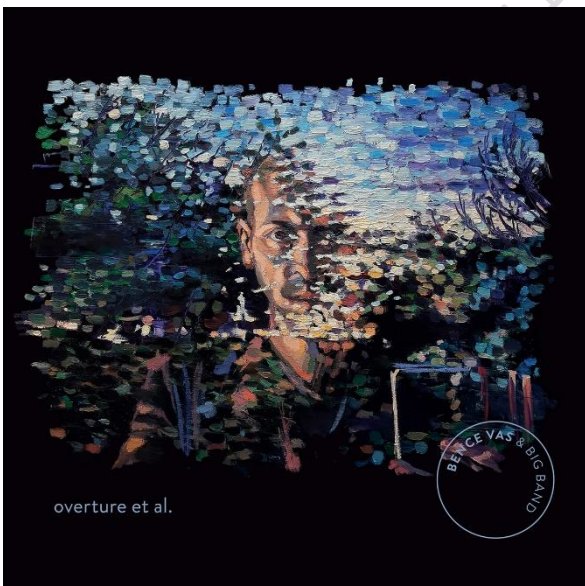
“I graduated as a painter, but after high school I started taking music even more seriously and went for a really interesting music school founded by blues, rock, and jazz musicians. My journey with the Hammond organ and jazz started there.”

From my early childhood, I wanted to be a painter and I think I must have been quite good at drawing and painting as I participated in a lot of art competitions. I also managed to study at one of the oldest art schools of Hungary. Back then, it was called the Secondary School of Fine and Applied Arts, Budapest. I graduated as a painter, but after high school I started taking music even more seriously and went for a really interesting music school founded by blues, rock, and jazz musicians. My journey with the Hammond organ and jazz started there.

Aldora Britain Records: And now, let’s take a leap forward to the present day and your current musical output. One of the things that really draws me in is your songwriting and songcraft. How do you approach the compositional process? Is it a case of jamming away and seeing where the music takes you, or is it more methodical than that?

Bence Vas: As I remember, your first meeting point with my music was the *Overture Et Al.* album, which is orchestral music. Writing for an orchestra is a beautiful but also really complex matter. In our case, most of the material was written in advance. That is necessary when you have almost twenty musicians to play your piece. But there were some open sections where soloists could add their parts following only minimal restrictions. Chord progression and the number of measures to fill, for example. I was also experimenting with the usage of a strict compositional technique, where the basic structure is mathematically defined regarding the most important dramaturgical points within the whole piece. It creates an interesting contrast between some freedom of improvisation and the rigid structure itself.

But if we take a look at the trio album, *Open-Closed Principle*, there are definitely fewer written parts and more space for the individual expression. In this particular case, I prepared the basics of the compositions. You can imagine it as a summarised score on one or two pages, without indicating the actual arrangement for the instruments. We came up with the arrangements during rehearsals. We were playing the material and playing with the material. After practicing and playing around with it for a while, we recorded one version of each of the pieces, and I can tell you that they are still changing a bit during each and every performance.



Aldora Britain Records: In 2020, you released an exceptional big band record entitled *Overture Et Al.* This was also my introduction to your music, so it holds a very special place in my collection. How do you reflect back on this set now as a whole, and how would you say you have grown and evolved as an artist since?

Bence Vas: I am currently working on some new material for orchestra again, so your question is very relevant now. Overall, I would say that I learned a lot, especially from an orchestration point of view. I must admit, this is the part of the process where I am the least experienced and there is still a lot for me to learn. I barely listen to my recordings. As you can imagine, to reach the point when you can finally have a recording session with an orchestra, requires months if not years of work and preparation, which also means that you are listening to this particular music over and over again. It is just simply too much for the ears and the

brain and usually I need to take a long break from it afterwards. However, it is also really important to listen to it after some time and try to learn not only from mistakes, but also try to find the parts which are working really well.

With all the experience from the previous sessions, I am certain that for the future sessions I will ask for more help, maybe a music producer or a more experienced composer, arranger or conductor who can revise my scores before the

“I am trying to decide about the structure at the very beginning. To build up a composition like a painting, a drawing, or even a sculpture. Starting with the big, empty canvas.”

recording, and maybe can help with some practical advice to elevate the whole composing, arranging, and recording process and experience to a new level.

Aldora Britain Records: As you well know, I love that Bence Vas sound and your approach to making and composing music. Elements of jazz, classical, and more. How would you say this style of yours came about, what goes into it for you, and who are some of your biggest influences and inspirations as an artist?

Bence Vas: For the experiment of structure, I read some analysis of composition techniques of modern Hungarian classical composers Bela Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly. I also listened to recordings of contemporary big bands from Hungary, Poland, Germany, the US, and the UK as well. Just to name a few of them, Modern Art Orchestra, Nikola Kolodziejczyk Orchestra, WDR Big Band, Maria Schneider Orchestra, and the Gareth Lockrane Big Band.

Overall, my composition process starts with some small elements. Fragments of melodies, some interesting rhythmic patterns, general musical texture. It is probably easier to describe from a visual experience, when you are looking at a painting from a distance or through a not fully transparent piece of glass. You do not see the specific details yet, but you already know how it sounds, what the colour scale will be. You see the brightest shapes and how much contrast you will use, the basic dynamics and dramaturgy of it. Sometimes I draw some shapes to try to express the dynamic dramatic waves and the most important points, together with the similarly important empty, quiet spots. Sometimes I even add the colours translated to the sounds of a particular group of instruments together. It also happens that I wake up with a fragment, or while I am walking, maybe travelling. I work on this fragment in my head and whenever I have an opportunity, I try to make some notes. Sometimes not even musical ones but using words or a kind of rhythm score with adding some note or chord names to it.

Nowadays, I am trying to decide about the structure at the very beginning. To build up a composition like a painting, a drawing, or even a sculpture. Starting with the big, empty canvas, which defines quite a lot of parameters itself already, and adding elements while balancing them on the other part of the piece. Then moving forward while constantly looking at the big picture, always.

Aldora Britain Records: In November 2022, you released a collaborative record called *Open-Closed Principle*. Bukowski and Szmanda are exceptional players in their own right, a fantastic meeting of minds! What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing it, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

Bence Vas: I think every album or musical material, which contains improvisation, is some kind of documentation. Documentation of ourselves, our playing at that very moment, where we are as musicians, performers, human beings at that particular time. Sometimes I am thinking that it would be a really interesting experiment to re-record it, to see how compositions have changed after we played all the pieces in front of audiences in Hungary, Transylvania, and Poland over the last couple of years.

About the writing... when the lockdown started, I was still working on the *Overture Et Al.* material. The recording session happened somewhere in the middle of that crisis. The *Open-Closed Principle* was born also during the COVID madness, but the recording sessions happened after it. So, as I feel, this music is definitely coming from the experience of being closed, then for some short time the breeze of



“I think every album or musical material, which contains improvisation, is some kind of documentation. Documentation of ourselves, our playing at that very moment, where we are as musicians, performers, human beings at that particular time.”

freedom came, then full closure again. After playing this music live for some time, I experienced on the stage that it’s meaning actually became a little bit different. It moved from this particular experience to something more general, yet still very human and individual, something we learned from those years and carried with us to the present, shaping us more than we would have thought.

Aldora Britain Records: I would like to pick out two personal favourites from your back-catalogue. Let’s go for ‘Overture’ and ‘Memorandum’. For each, what is the story behind the composition, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as an artist?

Bence Vas: Actually, I remember very well how ‘Memorandum’ started. I think it was May, I was in Budapest, the weather was already quite nice, and all the sycamore trees or plane trees had their leaves already, so the sun and the shade with movements of the leaves could create a beautiful play on the pavement. I was walking quite fast, as always, and the rhythm of my walking started working as a metronome and created a groove in my head. This little musical element started growing into this piece later, combined with some of the rhythmic sounds of a busy city, and due to the fact that it was kind of groovy and circular together, with the city experience, the basis of the main melody appeared on a very tradition jazz structure, the rhythm changes.

‘Overture’, one morning I woke up with a fragment playing in my head, the very beginning of the piece, the musical conversation between the piano and organ and the wind instruments. Around this time, I remember that I was listening to the ‘Piano Concerto’ by Emil Petrovics, so it might have inspired some parts of my work as well. I started with some drawings to express the dramaturgy with a couple of lines and shapes, and by the end of the day, the first part of the piece was ready.



“I made some terrible mistakes, hit some walls, and walked around in circles, just like in a prison cell. But I think I learned from those mistakes and art helped me tremendously to transfer some of those personal struggles into something hopefully interesting.”

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad?

Bence Vas: I do not know much about the music industry, I must admit. My personal feeling is that this ‘industry’ does not have a really good impact on such small initiatives, such as my works. It is getting more and more difficult, if not impossible, to find and connect with the audience who would appreciate this kind of music. There is so much noise in our world, not only in musical meaning but in general, and most of this noise is generated by all those industries and their ‘lovely’ algorithms. I remember an interview I heard on the radio while I was driving. It was a Polish musician whose father was also a musician himself, and basically, he was present in jazz almost from the very beginning in Poland. He mentioned that it was a terrible shock for him to realise that during the pandemic, there was no live music at all, not even rehearsals, nothing for people to gather and play or listen to music together. He remembered that even during World War Two, there was some live music whenever it was technically possible, and you probably know how terrible the war was for Poland and Hungary.

I have two examples to compare. Zoltan Kodaly’s ‘Missa Brevis’ was finalised by the composer while he was hiding in the cellars and shelters and had its premiere in the cloakroom of the Opera in Budapest. During the pandemic, one of the symphonic orchestras of Budapest tried to make a rehearsal in their own rehearsal space, and some people reported it to the authorities. Of course, it had some consequences...

How have these years impacted me personally and as an artist? Well, I had really tough years, to be honest. I made some terrible mistakes, hit some walls, and walked around in circles, just like in a prison cell. But I think I learned from those mistakes and art helped me tremendously to transfer some of those personal struggles into something hopefully interesting and maybe useful for other people as well.



Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Bence:** I do not have just one favourite artist. Generally speaking, I like those artists who were brave enough to walk on their own path, to dig really deep into themselves, to forget about categories, genres, and to experiment with stylistic expression freely. I am afraid it would be a long list, so just to name some of them, Jimmy Smith, Miles Davis, Gil Evans, Eddy Louiss, Frank Zappa, Maria Schneider, Krzysztof Komeda, Tomasz Stanko. And not only musicians, Gyorgy Faludy, Janos Pilinszky, Peter Ezterhazy, Milan Fust, etcetera.

AB Records: Favourite album? **Bence:** My all-time favourites are the Gil Evans and Miles Davis albums, *Data Lords* by Maria Schneider Orchestra, *Beat in Space* by Modern Art Orchestra, *Lumpy Gravy* and *The Yellow Shark* by Frank Zappa. And, of course, Jimmy Smith's *Back at the Chicken Shack*, John McLaughlin and Joey DeFrancesco's *After the Rain*, Eddy Louiss' *Porgy and Bess: Jazz in Paris*, and Eddy Louiss, Kenny Clarke and Rene Thomas' *Trio*.

AB Records: First gig as an audience member? **Bence:** I do not remember exactly the very first one, but it must have been a Hungarian rock or blues band in my early teenage years.

AB Records: Loudest gig as an audience member? **Bence:** I think it was one of the iconic blues bands of Hungary, the Hobo Blues Band. They started playing in the 80s and this concert was some anniversary event, around 2012 maybe. It took place at the biggest stadium in Budapest and this band was famous for being the loudest in the country, so I think you can imagine how it sounded!

AB Records: Style icon? **Bence:** To be honest, I am not sure how to answer this question. I am not sure I have one.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Bence:** *Otodik Pecset*, 'The Fifth Seal' in English, an iconic Hungarian film by Zoltan Fabri.

AB Records: Favourite TV show? **Bence:** As Pickle Rick from *Rick and Morty* says, 'I would answer your question if I could, but I won't because I can't!'

AB Records: Favourite underground artist? **Bence:** If I had to choose only one, I think I would say Frank Zappa, if we can still consider him as underground. But I think he is even more underground these days than during his lifetime.



Breaking Down the Walls

Claire Foster and Rick Meissner had collaborated for a decade before embarking on their recent adventure with the **SUPER HIGH RIGHT NOW** project. In the sun-soaked climes of San Francisco, California, this worldly duo ignited a musical spark that led to the creation of a richly textured psychedelic realm, an extraordinary amalgamation of blue-eyed soul, rootsy blues, Latin rock, and more. This eclectic foundation would eventually give the world an exquisitely crafted LP in the form of *Dreaming in Color*, an eleven-track outing showcasing the Foster-Meissner partnership in full creative flow. The record has a 'Golden Age' undercurrent, harking back to the classic sounds of the 60s and 70s, all the while bringing a Super High Right Now twist. This is the very essence of the group's fresh and invigorating stylistic approach. With *Dreaming in Color* passing its third anniversary this month, Rick took some time to reflect with *Aldora Britain Records* on this period of his rock and roll journey. We discuss his key inspirations, the impact of the COVID pandemic, his earliest musical memories, and much, much more. That conversation is published here in full for the very first time.

Super High Right Now have previously contributed their track 'Meet Me Halfway' to our 'Just Want to Say Hello' compilation. Listen or download [HERE](#).

If you enjoy this content, please consider making a small, magazine-sized donation at the following link: <https://paypal.me/aldorabritainrecords>. Thank you!

Aldora Britain Records: Hello Rick, how are you? I am excited to be talking to such an innovative artist from San Francisco. It is amazing how music can bring us together. Let's start off by travelling back in time. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what was it that first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

Rick Meissner: Hi Tom! Thanks for reaching out and supporting so many independent musicians. Childhood memories of music in my home are varied. My father was an immigrant from Germany. My mother's family were Spanish and Puerto Rican. They both loved music although neither played an instrument. The recordings and radio my parents listened to were classical compositions, mostly Mozart and Beethoven and a bit of more modern composers like Aaron Copland. Showtunes were also in rotation. I really enjoyed the atmosphere this music created in our home. Parties at my maternal grandmother's home were super fun with dancing to Latin favourites like Perez Prado and Tito Puente.

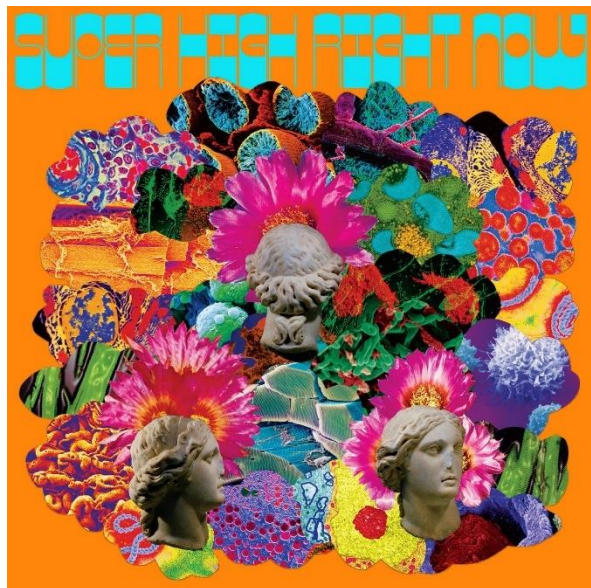


“Our musical backgrounds are different but the ease we have playing music, and the fun we have creating, has kept us together for all these years.”

I became a teenager in the late 60s, much to my liking, both sides of my family expanded their musical horizons to more contemporary artists like Simon and Garfunkel, Santana, Herb Alpert. The first memory I have of playing an instrument is sitting in a big reclining chair with my father’s chromatic harmonica. He played only one song on it! I would improvise endlessly thinking I was creating beautiful music with crescendos and quiet passages, sort of making up my own symphonic music. Ha! That improvising spirit is still at the core of who I am musically.

Aldora Britain Records: And now, let’s take a leap forward to a recent project with Claire Foster, the fantastic Super High Right Now. The beginnings of this group must have been such an invigorating time. How did it all come together? How did you meet each other and what was the initial spark that brought you together musically?

Rick Meissner: Claire Foster and I met through the elementary school that our children attended, where we put together some casual bands made up of parents and then played for school events. Our musical backgrounds are different but the ease we have playing music, and the fun we have creating, has kept us together for all these years. Around 2014, Claire sang backups in another band I was in called King and Ace. After that project ended, we decided to create our new band Super High Right Now, featuring my songwriting and both of us singing lead vocals. Along with her fantastic singing, I love the passion and presence she brings to the music.



Aldora Britain Records: Towards the end of 2020, you released a fantastic record entitled *Dreaming in Color*. This is a quintessential example of what Super High Right Now are all about. What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing this set, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

Rick Meissner: The genesis of *Dreaming in Color* goes along with what I see as the theme of the record. I hear in these songs either a loss of or a longing for connection. The connection with one another, with the Earth, and with our soul’s purpose. We wanted to get this music out to connect to the greater world. We were so stoked that you found us! For a few years, we played out in local clubs in Marin County, just north of San Francisco, and had polished up a bunch of my songs as well as some covers. We felt ready to take it to the next level with a recording project that would reflect

the creative spirit we felt in our music. Thankfully, the basic tracks were recorded in late February 2020, two weeks before the COVID lockdown here in the US.

It was a very special experience to have the production and musical assistance of my daughter Ivy Meissner and her partner Julian Cubillos. Over the course of the next eight months, we remotely layered in tracks, mixed, and finalised the record. My daughter Maya Meissner and her husband Lorenzo Fanton created the album art and design. And that was a major reason for printing up vinyl records. I love beautiful album art! I feel an album is a reflection of where you are in a moment of time. Yes, there could be endless tinkering to improve one thing or another. But really, I’d rather make a new record! Maybe even re-record one of these songs.

Aldora Britain Records: I think one of the crucial elements that draws me to this album is your impressive songwriting and songcraft. The colour in the songs if you will. How do you approach this part of your process? Are you drawn to particular themes or topics? Perhaps coming from a personal, observational, or even fictional perspective?

Rick Meissner: My experience with songwriting has been quite varied. On this record, there are songs that were crafted with poetic and musical intention leading the process. Others came to me in a flash as if they were already

“I hear in these songs either a loss of or a longing for connection. The connection with one another, with the Earth, and with our soul’s purpose. We wanted to get this music out to connect to the greater world.”

written and I just had to pick up the pen and guitar and deliver the goods. One song was recorded previously and rewritten for this recording. Two others are cowrites with a lifelong friend. I am often amazed at what happens when I sit down to write as the elements coalesce into something that wasn’t there beforehand and now exists. It is a bit magical.

Aldora Britain Records: I would like to get more specific now by picking out two personal favourites. Let’s go for ‘This Black and Blue’ and ‘The Show’. For each, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer?

Rick Meissner: I see the lyrics in ‘This Black and Blue’ as a reflection of some of my own personal experiences, as well as what I observe in others. Most of these themes are close to me and came easily. There’s a bit of where one’s been, how that feels, and where one wants to be. Then there’s the expression of a desire for someone else to make the journey easier, and then importantly, the dream of when it may become reality.

‘The Show’ came to me in a flash. One evening before going to bed, all the verses and chorus came with little or no editing. I had recently had a serious health event that had me thinking about my mortality. The lyrics are really more socially topical but with the overlying personal experience of witnessing humanity’s failings while still conjuring up the spirit to stick around to see what else might happen.

Aldora Britain Records: As you well know by now, I love the Super High Right Now sound and your approach to making music. Elements of Americana, soul, blues rock, Latin music, and more. How did this style of yours come about, what goes into it for you, and who are some of your biggest influences and inspirations as a band?

Rick Meissner: My musical style is largely influenced by elements of music that is rooted in the African American hybrid sounds I grew up with. Blues, rock and roll from the 50s and 60s and 70s, Latin music, jazz, gospel. I love the rhythm, melodies, and emotion in this music. I also find comfort and inspiration in folk song forms that tell stories, have beautiful melodies, and carry weight in their ability to stir our emotions. Some names? B.B. King, Mississippi John Hurt, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Louis Jordan, Ray Charles, Miles Davis, Aretha Franklin, Carole King, The Allman Brothers Band, the Grateful Dead, The Band, Santana, The Beatles, Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, John Prine, Neil Young, Tom Petty. The list goes on and on!

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has impacted the music industry, both for the good and the bad?

Rick Meissner: The last few years have provided me with more time to myself to work on my songwriting and guitar. I feel charged and excited to play! From what I’m seeing locally, people have been coming out to hear live music with a greater appreciation for that experience after having had it taken away for a few years. As you are aware, there is a



“The last few years have provided me with more time to myself to work on my songwriting and guitar. I feel charged and excited to play! From what I’m seeing locally, people have been coming out to hear live music with a greater appreciation for that experience after having had it taken away.”

very obvious problem with musicians being able to make enough money for their craft. I think there is potential to reinvigorate the live music scene by local promotion of local sounds, like the old days, Motown, Memphis, etcetera. This could be similar to the Locavore food movement which brings pride and identity, as well as income to local scenes. I’d love to talk with you more about this sometime!

Quickfire Round

Aldora Britain Records: Favourite artist? Favourite album? First gig as an audience member? Loudest gig as an audience member? Style icon? Favourite film? Favourite TV show? Favourite underground artist?

Rick Meissner: Quickfire round? Sorry, Tom, I’m going to have to pass on most of these as I really can’t pick favourites. I always end up thinking, ‘Well, what about...?’. But I will say my first concert was Traffic in Long Island during their *Welcome to the Canteen* tour. Great band! Loudest show was Los Lobos, another great band, at The Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco. My favourite underground artist is appropriately Ivy Meissner, a.k.a. Little Mystery. Keep an eye out for her second recording, to be released in 2024.

Thanks for indulging me in this reflection of my music experience and the album. I have to let you know that we have recently had a branding and name change for Super High Right Now. Yes, there’s various reasons of which I won’t go into here, but you can find us now as ‘Ricko Che’. We’ve got new songs, fresh energy, and we’re hoping to have a recording released sometime in 2024!



Skeletons on the Shelves

Neo-psychedelic kingpin, garage rock maverick, pop music crooner. London-based **ADAM CAMM** mixes all these approaches into a glistening, fresh, and original style. This approach has launched an impressive and exciting solo career, kicking off with the *Echo Chamber EP* in 2021. These four tracks laid the perfect foundation stones for an alternative realm of technicolour whimsy and mystery. And now, this British songsmith is more than ably building this otherworldly sonic kingdom from the ground up. In May of this year, a full-length album, *Mirror, Mirror*, was unveiled to positive underground acclaim, highlighting brilliantly vivid and rich flourishes through tracks including 'Devil in the Detail' and 'Abandoned'. The most exciting prospect is perhaps the evolution that has occurred in between *Echo Chamber EP* and *Mirror, Mirror*. Adam Camm has truly secured his place as a contemporary progressive pioneer. With the momentum behind this unique approach continuing to build, he took a respite to once again chat with *Aldora Britain Records* about his musical voyages so far. We discuss the impact of the COVID pandemic, glam rock videos, *Exile on Main St.*, and much more.

Adam Camm has previously released his single 'Abandoned' on Aldora Britain Records. Listen or download [HERE](#).

If you enjoy this content, please consider making a small, magazine-sized donation at the following link: <https://paypal.me/aldorabritainrecords>. Thank you!

Aldora Britain Records: Hello Adam, how are you? I think it is about time that we welcomed you back to the *Aldora Britain Records* e-Zine. I really enjoyed our chat last year. As always, I would like to kick things off today by travelling back in time. Previously, you discussed your early memories of watching glam rock videos. What appeal did these spectacles have to you? How has it informed your music in later life? I think some of that theatricality definitely comes through.

Adam Camm: I'm very good, thanks. It's an absolute pleasure to be asked back for another e-Zine. I think the catchiness of the songs is what got me at first. A lot of glam rock had those terrace friendly choruses similar to what I would sing at football matches. At least those songs I was allowed to sing at that age! As I grew older, I understood the style aspect more, the theatricality as you put it, and I think anything you indulge in at a young age comes through in later life.



“As I grew older, I understood the style aspect more, the theatricality as you put it, and I think anything you indulge in at a young age comes through in later life.”

Aldora Britain Records: As you well know, I love the sonic realms that you live your life in. I described it last time as a ‘psychedelic dreamworld’. Away from the glam, you also dig The Stones, The Beatles, and The Beach Boys. I believe *Exile on Main St.* is a special record for you. Can you remember the first time you heard this album? What impression did it make? More broadly, who are some of your current influences and inspirations?

Adam Camm: Funnily enough, when I first listened to *Exile*, I wasn’t taken by it. For me, it was a grower and it’s often those albums that you invest in that you get the greatest reward from. Now, I think it’s the record that epitomises The Stones most for me, their absolute peak. I’m sure big fans of the Brian Jones era will argue that statement, mind!

I’ve been listening to some different stuff recently. ‘Pinball’ by Brian Protheroe has had some spins. I’ve been going through some of Pearl Charles’ back catalogue. Dylan’s recent *Budokan* reissue. *Polnareff’s* by Michel Polnareff was recommended to me and it’s a really great album. I must say I was also very pleasantly surprised by the recent Stones album. Finally, I’ve been going through the mono versions of The Beatles’ albums. None of the stereo remasters of the recent years come close to how fantastic they sound.



Aldora Britain Records: Last time, we spoke about the glorious *Echo Chamber*, my introduction to your music. Since then, you have released a spectacular follow-up called *Mirror, Mirror*. Ten more tracks from the Adam Camm canon. Thank you for the music! What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing this set, and how would you say you have grown and evolved since the release of *Echo Chamber*?

Adam Camm: I started writing the album almost immediately after the EP. The first track being ‘Devil in the Detail’, which nearly made it on the EP. The biggest difference between the EP and the album is that I enlisted the help of Steve Cornell to mix and act as an assistant producer. It gave me a useful sounding board. The EP is also a lot more experimental, and the album is a little more accessible and that was a conscious decision.

Aldora Britain Records: As I have said, it is a sensational record from start to finish, top to bottom, but I would like to pick out two personal favourites. Let’s go for ‘Devil in the Detail’ and ‘Abandoned’, a couple of garage pearls! For each, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer and artist?

Adam Camm: Thanks for the compliments! It’s always great to hear from people who enjoy my music. As I mentioned previously, ‘Devil in the Detail’ was written and recorded as soon as the EP was finished. It’s basically about having that little devil on your shoulder, leading you to make decisions you otherwise might not. There’s a scene in *Animal House* where the guy has an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other, and that started off the trigger in my mind to write the rest.

‘Abandoned’ came about after I had built my Kama Sitar – watch the reel on my Insta account! – and I was playing about with a riff. I then put the rest behind it, and I had the main bulk of the song. Then I thought to myself, ‘Let’s twist this a bit’, and that’s how the refrain started. The lyrics are just a series of opposites which reflect the confusion in the song about life and society. I wouldn’t say it’s autobiographical, but I think it does reflect a general bewilderment at the world.

“The lyrics are just a series of opposites which reflect the confusion in the song about life and society. I wouldn’t say it’s autobiographical, but I think it does reflect a general bewilderment at the world.”

Aldora Britain Records: I think another big draw for me is your quirky and unique songwriting and songcraft. It has layers and differing approaches, and that variety really is brilliant. It gives the music depth and a colourful edge. How do you approach this part of your creative process? Are you often drawn to particular themes or topics? Perhaps coming from a personal, observational, or even fictional perspective?

Adam Camm: I like to write about characters, but sometimes it could just be a random phrase that has stuck in my mind, and I’ve built from there. Luckily for me, I have a home studio that I can potter about in and play about with my instruments. That’s how I come up with the layers of textures to the tracks.

Aldora Britain Records: In 2020, you completed a trilogy of Halloween Jack releases when you unleashed the *Centre* EP. I have only just discovered this outing over on Bandcamp, but I have been really enjoying it already. Four superb tracks from the band. How do you reflect back on this release as a whole now, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

Adam Camm: My favourite EP of the three is *Right*. My regret is that I didn’t keep some songs for my solo album! I’m joking, but seriously speaking it was a great time for myself and Ian because this project kickstarted our own projects, leading to my *Echo Chamber EP* and the album. Ian is also playing in the live band so we may throw in a track or two from those EPs when I do play live.

I think any musician looks back on something and picks flaws that they could change. I have that in my album. But to me, these are lessons which you apply in your next project, and you move on.

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad? I am curious to hear your insights.



“I wouldn’t say that any of the politics of the recent years have inspired or driven my music, but I do think the last few years have had a profound effect on the music industry.”

Adam Camm: I’ve certainly been more productive. Like many others, I used the pandemic to not only work on the Halloween Jack EP trilogy, but to then work on what would become *Echo Chamber*. This burst of creativity sparked a more productive output where I’ve managed to build up a larger body of work. I wouldn’t say that any of the politics of the recent years have inspired or driven my music, but I do think the last few years have had a profound effect on the music industry.

I feel the period you talk about has highlighted a number of things about the industry. Frankly, I don’t believe music is particularly valued by general society. People now expect to have access to almost all recorded music for a relatively small monthly fee. Musicians, amongst others, weren’t supported in the pandemic but simply told they should consider retraining. And it’s not just musicians, but also the whole ecosystem being hit. From journalists to gig venues, studios, and rehearsal rooms, all are affected when money becomes scarce in that industry. Sadly, I feel that tech companies are reaping the benefits rather than the creatives and their support system. And this isn’t exclusive to just the music industry.

Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Adam:** Rolling Stones.

AB Records: Favourite album? **Adam:** *Exile on Main St.*

AB Records: First gig as an audience member? **Adam:** Brian May at the NEC in Birmingham, either ’91 or ’92.

AB Records: Loudest gig as an audience member? **Adam:** Warehouse Project in Manchester was pretty loud.

AB Records: Style icon? **Adam:** Jagger, McCartney.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Adam:** *The Godfather*.

AB Records: Favourite TV show? **Adam:** *Peep Show*.

AB Records: Favourite underground artist? **Adam:** Met so many through social media, I couldn’t pick one.



You Gotta Play

RYAN CHRYS is a steadfast inductee of Colorado's music royalty. With the backing of **THE ROUGH CUTS**, this renowned Denver troubadour has breathed new life into the country music scene of the Mountain West. His cult following is devout, testifying at the altar of outlaw country grit, determined folk-inclined honesty, and earthy roots rock and roll. It is this all-star formula that has paved the way for such acclaimed underground offerings as 2019's *Western Abyss* and 2022's *Tears and Blades*. Each set delves deeper on a tunesmith in his prime, also snapshotting the connectivity and tightknit nature of The Rough Cuts, a band well-worn from the road and their universally acclaimed live show. They are a force of nature, unforgiving and unforgettable. With live shows coming up in Loveland, Colorado Springs, Denver, and Fort Collins, bandleader Ryan Chrys took a short break to reflect with *Aldora Britain Records* once again on his well-travelled life on the road. We discuss early musical memories, his songwriting process, the *Tears and Blades* LP, and much, much more. That conversation is published here in full for the very first time.

Ryan Chrys and the Rough Cuts have previously contributed their track 'When the Rodeo is Over' to our 'New Music for a New Decade' compilation. Listen or download [HERE](#).

If you enjoy this content, please consider making a small, magazine-sized donation at the following link: <https://paypal.me/aldorabritainrecords>. Thank you!

Aldora Britain Records: Hello Ryan, how are you? I think it is about time that we welcomed you back to the *Aldora Britain Records* e-Zine. It has been far too long! Did you know the last time was all the way back in 2020? As always, I would like to kick things off by stepping inside the time machine. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what was it that first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

Ryan Chrys: I'm good! Indeed, too long... but I've been keeping tabs on *ABR*, and I always appreciate what you do for music. My earliest music memories, first, are of my mom playing her guitar and singing. She'd play and sing with her sisters, my aunts, when they were visiting, they had amazing harmonies! And she played at parties and oftentimes in the living room just for fun. And as I was growing up, she'd always play old country on the stereo. She was a fan of Crystal Gale, Joan Baez, Juice Newton, Willie Nelson, Elvis, Dolly, etcetera. As I got older, my older brother would be playing AC/DC in his bedroom. I began to love rock as well. I always loved music but early on it was my mom playing her guitar that inspired me, and she taught me my first chords!



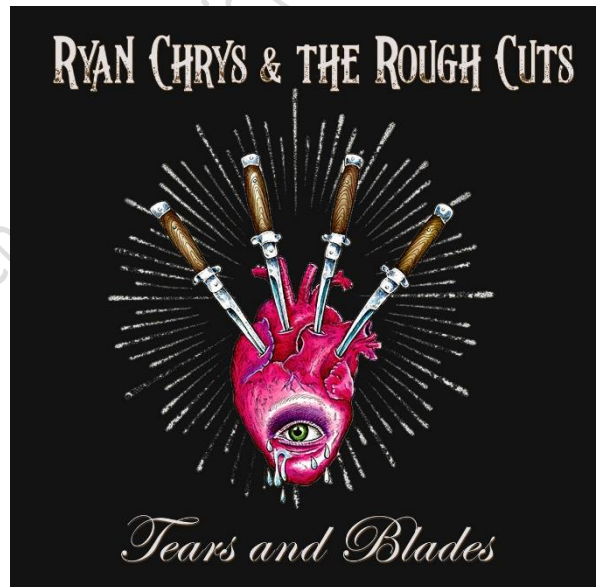
“Something about an old Western story put into a three-minute song is something I love, and it’s not that easy to do. I just try to grab at inspiration whenever it drifts through my mind.”

Aldora Britain Records: Throughout your music career, even before The Rough Cuts came to be, you have always written songs. Doodling and noodling away, a true troubadour! I am so glad you found this outlet for your tunes. How do you approach this part of your creative process? Are you drawn to any themes or topics in particular? Perhaps coming from a personal, observational, or even fictional perspective?

Ryan Chrys: I don’t have a particular process. I try to be open and aware of inspiration all around. Sometimes a lyric will come, sometimes a riff. I’m pretty much a positive guy, so I often write songs that have a positive message, but I do love fictional stories! Writing stories about outlaws and cowboys and such is my favourite. Johnny Cash, Willie, and Waylon were all good at this. Songs like ‘Folsom Prison’, ‘Red Headed Stranger’, etcetera. Something about an old Western story put into a three-minute song is something I love, and it’s not that easy to do. I just try to grab at inspiration whenever it drifts through my mind, which I seemingly have no control over, ha!

Aldora Britain Records: Last time, we had a long chat about *Western Abyss*, a seminal underground record in my opinion. Since then, you have unveiled an LP called *Tears and Blades*. I have been listening to this set over on Bandcamp recently. What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing it, and how would you say you have grown and evolved as a band since the days of *Western Abyss*?

Ryan Chrys: Yes, all true, and we’re about to release a brand new album this coming spring of 2024! I loved recording *Tears and Blades* and I’m very happy with that album. We recorded all the music live in the studio with a seven-piece band. I hired a session keyboard-piano player and another guitar player, a dear friend of mine, and we did it all together live in a big room. We did vocal overdubs later, but the music is what we played on the spot, and it turned out great! There was a lot going on in our lives that contributed to the songs and title of that album. Our drummer potentially having to leave the band due to a risky back surgery, the craziness that would develop with the world pandemic, and also our love of switchblade knives, ha! It was just something we started collecting on the road. We all purchased blades while on tour on an Indian reservation in New Mexico and it became a thing. We still carry the blades!



Aldora Britain Records: It is such a strong set from start to finish, top to bottom, but I would like to pick out two personal favourites. Let’s go for ‘Seein’ You Tonight’ and ‘Wasted’, two further Rough Cuts classics! For each, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer and artist?

Adam Camm: Yes, I love those songs! ‘Seein’ You Tonight’ is a true story. It’s about our singer Lauren, who sings it on the record brilliantly, and her fiancée Carlos. I wrote it in a hotel room while we were on tour in Oregon. It’s tough being away from home on long tours, and the song tells that story. The highway miles, the sleepless nights, and her fiancée is an airplane mechanic, so that is why the second verse talks about working on planes and taking flight, etcetera.

‘Wasted’ is pretty much the opposite end of the spectrum. This is a fictional story about lost love. I love the old acronym when a lover betrays another, ‘You stabbed me in the back...’, which of course just means, ‘You betrayed me...’, and with our band being known for carrying knives, it all just kind of came together. I don’t write a lot of ballads, but

“The music is what we played on the spot, and it turned out great! There was a lot going on in our lives that contributed to the songs and title of that album.”

I felt that one was a powerful one and a powerful story with good imagery, and I was especially pleased how we conveyed that musically with the band in the studio.



Aldora Britain Records: Last time we spoke, we talked about your sound and how it came about. That country rock and roll feel! You namechecked an album by Sturgill Simpson called *Sound and Fury* as an all-time favourite. Can you remember the first time you heard this record? How has it informed you as both a person and as an artist? Also, who would you say is inspiring The Rough Cuts currently? I have a feeling it could be quite a broad and varied melting pot.

Ryan Chrys: Yeah, great record! But the thing about it is not just that record, but Sturgill's willingness to change styles so freely and his fearlessness in releasing a rock oriented album after having only released country albums. That kind of thing can alienate fans. For me, it inspired me to allow my styles to vary more and more, that it's okay to release both country and rock in seemingly random fashion however you feel it! There are a lot of artists I currently

draw inspiration from, like Charley Crockett, Paul Cauthen, JD McPherson, and I really love Larkin Poe. I saw them live recently, awesome show, check them out if you haven't heard of them.

Aldora Britain Records: Recently, I discovered another outing from you. Way back in 2008, under the name of the Demon Funkies, you released something a little different entitled *Punk Junkies*. I have been enjoying getting to know this record lately. Let's chat about it! How do you reflect back on this LP as a whole now, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

Ryan Chrys: Yes, that was one of my first bands, I was very into punk, funk, and rock. In those days, as a guitarist, I wrote a lot of riffs and then wrote lyrics around them. Later on, as my songwriting developed, I realised I was writing less riffs and writing more lyrics and stories, and all my songwriting at that point was country. I had come back to my roots. I still love the *Punk Junkies* album though, it is very rocking and raw. We had a great band then! I love the energy and power of the music. My only hindsight is that I feel the lyrics lacked content. Not that they were bad per se, but most of the lyrics just aren't meaningful, nor do they carry a message. But hey, in rock and roll, they don't always have to!

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad? I am curious to hear your insights!

Ryan Chrys: Definitely crazy times, but I think now, at this point, we are all realising there is some silver lining to it all. We all lost so much, people, time, money, etcetera, but there are things we gained from, where we focused our time, be it new songs from songwriting, new art, relationships, etcetera. I worked on building a studio and restoring an old Ford Mustang. As a band though, it really hurt us in our momentum from touring. We had been touring hard and building great relationships around the country. That all came to an abrupt halt for a good two years. Now we're touring again, and a lot of clubs have changed hands, different agents, and we're having to rebuild a lot of our momentum. It's been tough, it has set us back at least two or three years. It has been very hard for everyone in the

“As a band though, it really hurt us in our momentum from touring. We had been touring hard and building great relationships around the country. That all came to an abrupt halt for a good two years.”

entertainment industry, from artists to business owners, it’s been crushing. Things are better now and getting better still, thankfully, but damn we lost a lot.

Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Ryan:** Too many to list one. Willie, Waylon, Johnny Cash, and more recently Lukas Nelson, Larkin Poe, Charley Crockett, Jason Boland and the Stragglers.

AB Records: Favourite album? **Ryan:** On vinyl, I absolutely love *First Rose of Spring* by Willie Nelson.

AB Records: First gig as an audience member? **Ryan:** My mom took me to see one of her favourite bands at the time, Air Supply. I was just a kid.

AB Records: Loudest gig as an audience member? **Ryan:** Motley Crue in high school, but I saw Queensryche this year in Sturgis. I cannot even believe how loud it was, painfully wall-shaking loud.

AB Records: Style icon? **Ryan:** Joe Perry.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Ryan:** *High Plains Drifter*.

AB Records: Favourite TV show? **Ryan:** *Roadkill*.

AB Records: Favourite underground artist? **Ryan:** Jesse Daniel, Alex Williams, Mike and the Moonpies.



The Heart of the Trouble

The jangly indie pop sensibilities of the British Isles have continuously grown in stature since the 60s Merseybeat boom. There has been an endless stream of melodically conscious and hook leaning artists ever since. Whether it be The Beatles or Squeeze or Del Amitri, this uniquely homegrown approach to songcraft continues to endure and shine. Natural heirs to this proud lineage are Charlie Mear and his fantastic **THIS CIRCUS LIFE** project, an outlet that emphasises alternative inclinations, fusing them with a classic pop rock sensibility. Beneath this, Charlie's lyrics are full of charm and joy or melancholy and sorrow, each end of the spectrum finds space within This Circus Life's stellar discography. Records such as *The Great Leap Forward for Love*, *The Lost Art of Everything*, *The Last Man Standing*, and *The Vast and Endless Sea* are truly timeless, snapshots of brilliance awaiting their accolades. With a new festive offering 'What is This Thing? (Called Christmas Time)' just released, Charlie chats to *Aldora Britain Records* about This Circus Life's growth and evolution. We discuss the project's beginnings, its recorded output, popular compositions, and much more.

This Circus Life have previously contributed their track 'Lucky Escape' to our 'Coded Language' compilation. Listen or download [HERE](#).

If you enjoy this content, please consider making a small, magazine-sized donation at the following link: <https://paypal.me/aldorabritainrecords>. Thank you!

Aldora Britain Records: Hello Charlie, how are you? I am excited to be talking to the creative force behind This Circus Life. I am a big fan of the project! Let's start off by jumping back in time. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what was it that first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

Charlie Mear: I had four older brothers who had great taste in music, so I grew up in the 70s listening to everything from Cat Stevens to Frank Zappa. Music was always playing in one bedroom or another. Two of the brothers played guitar. I knew I wanted to learn an instrument but didn't want to learn guitar as I wanted to be different to them. So, I wanted to be a drummer. But with a family of seven in a small house, a drumkit was never going to happen, so I took up the bass guitar instead.

Aldora Britain Records: And now, let's take a leap forward to the late 2010s and the brilliant This Circus Life. The beginnings and early days of this project must have been such an invigorating time. How did it all come to be? What was the initial spark? Is it an outlet for your solo musings or more of a collaborative kind of feel?



“I then went through a very challenging seven year period ... I started writing songs as an outlet to deal with it all. After a year or so, I was quite happy with how the songs were sounding so I formed a band around it all.”

Charlie Mear: I'd taken a fair few years off from serious music to start a family and bring up four sons. One of whom, Ben, now plays drums in the band. I then went through a very challenging seven year period where I got divorced, lost the advertising business I had been running, lost my house, and then my father and one of my brothers passed away. I started writing songs as an outlet to deal with it all. After a year or so, I was quite happy with how the songs were sounding so I formed a band around it all and This Circus Life was born.

Aldora Britain Records: 2023 saw you unleash an incredible LP in the form of the unforgettable *Great Leap Forward for Love*. This was my introduction to your music, so I look back on it very fondly. What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing this set, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

Charlie Mear: I tend to write a lot and I record everything I write, for better or worse. We had put out three albums and one EP in a little over three years, but I already had a bunch of new songs backed up, so another album was the answer. Overall, I would say this is a more positive record than the others, largely because the awful seven year period I went through was getting further behind me as each year passed.

Aldora Britain Records: It is a cracking set from start to finish, but I would like to pick out two personal favourites. Let's go for 'Still the One' and 'Lucky Escape'. For each, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer?

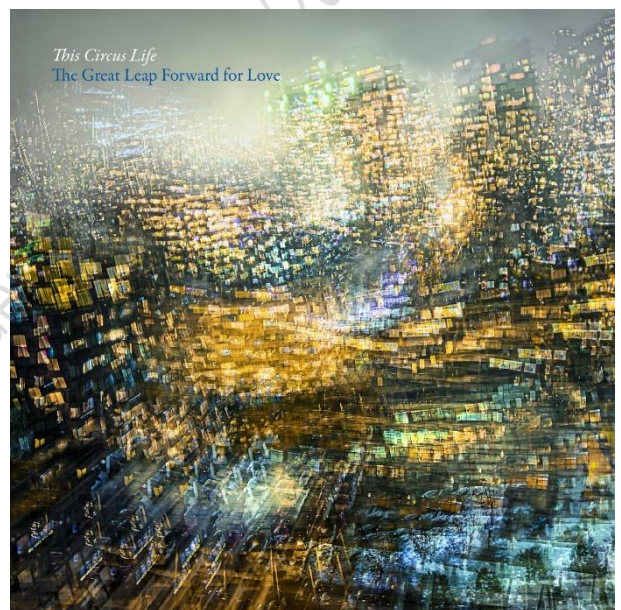
Charlie Mear: 'Still the One' is about my mum. Through all of life's challenges, she has always been there and continues to be there for me and my brothers. She's ninety-three now and is still going strong. She's a marvel! 'Lucky Escape' is just a made up story. Quite a few of our songs are on the slow side, and as we play a lot of festivals, I really needed to write a few more up-tempo songs. It's just a bit of fun that song.

Aldora Britain Records: As you well know, I am a big fan your sound and approach to making music. Jangle pop, folk rock, alternative indie... or should I just say 'fock'. How would you say this style of yours came about, what goes into it for you, and who are some of your biggest influences and inspirations as an artist?

Charlie Mear: I'm glad you like our sound. To be honest, we didn't set out with a certain sound in mind. We just thought we would record the songs and see what came out. Our producer is a chap called Dan Wilde, who is a highly accomplished folk artist, and I think having Dan in the chair really brought the folk sensibilities to the table. He's really helped shape our sound. I also listen to a lot of Dylan and a lot of 80s and 90s pop rock acts like Del Amitri, Crowded House, and Squeeze, so I am a big fan of proper songwriting.

Aldora Britain Records: Previously, if we travel back to 2022, you released another astonishing album. I am talking about the spectacular *Lost Art of Everything*, of course! An underground gem of a record. How do you reflect on this LP as a whole now, and how would you say you have grown and evolved as an artist since?

Charlie Mear: I think it's one of our best. It's the most complete and joined up record, I think. It sounds like an album rather than just a collection of songs. The track 'Bag of Stones' is my favourite on it. It was turned into a mini film by



“Music is now far more democratic. More people can make it and get it out into the world, rather than a few big recording companies controlling the market. It’s been a liberation for me.”

a film director friend of mine, Julia Kolesnik. I think we still sound like the same band now, the only difference is that we are recording more up-tempo songs generally.

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad?

Charlie Mear: Politically and socially, I worry about how social media polarises people more and more. From an artistic perspective, social media and the digital world has changed the music industry forever, and I actually think that’s a good thing. Recording has become easier and cheaper, and distribution is now super easy. Music is now far more democratic. More people can make it and get it out into the world, rather than a few big recording companies controlling the market. It’s been a liberation for me.

Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Charlie:** Too hard to land on one, but how can I not say The Beatles?

AB Records: Favourite album? **Charlie:** *Desire* by Bob Dylan.

AB Records: First gig as an audience member? **Charlie:** Hawkwind.

AB Records: Loudest gig as an audience member? **Charlie:** Hawkwind.

AB Records: Style icon? **Charlie:** Paul McCartney.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Charlie:** *I’m Alright Jack* with Peter Sellers.

AB Records: Favourite TV show? **Charlie:** *Black Books*.

AB Records: Favourite underground artist? **Charlie:** Douglas in Fur.



Doktor Doom

KIKO AND THE BLUES REFUGEES are the barnstorming new rhythm and blues revue from Porto, Portugal. Their strange brew is centred around toe-tapping, hip-shaking brilliance, encouraging audiences to stand up and let loose. There are soulful outbursts, bluesy hollers, and funky rhythms coalescing in a weird and wonderful European music cocktail, influenced by greats such as Marvin Gaye and Curtis Mayfield, and contemporaries including Durand Jones and JD McPherson. This delightfully incendiary eruption was originally unleashed by way of 2021's *Threadbare* LP, an eleven-song selection of this Portuguese combo's very best. More recently, in January 2023, the group unveiled their follow-up single, the progressive soul offering of 'Doktor Doom', undoubtedly their quintessential offering to date and an enticing snapshot of where Kiko and the Blues Refugees may be headed next. As momentum behind this soul music powerhouse continues to grow, the eponymous Kiko Pereira chatted to *Aldora Britain Records* about his journey through groove and rhythm so far. We discuss the group's recorded output, popular compositions, the band's evolution, and much more.

Kiko and the Blues Refugees have previously contributed their track 'Doktor Doom' to our 'Pulp' compilation. Listen or download [HERE](#).

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Aldora Britain Records: Hello Kiko, how are you? I am excited to be talking to the creative mastermind behind The Blues Refugees. I am a big fan of the band! Let's start off by stepping inside the time machine. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what was it that first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

Kiko Pereira: Hello Tom! Great to hear that you enjoy our music, it's very kind of you. Going back, way back, I was born in Newark, and when I came to live in Portugal, I guess I was the guy that could speak and sound more believable, so singing came naturally because I couldn't play any other instruments. Then I started to enjoy it more and more and it took off from there. Also, I used to hangout with many of my sister's friends that were a bit older than me and exposed me to so much incredible music. I started to get more curious, and that passion has been what has driven me ever since.



Picture by Alberto Almeida.

“It started to come together when I began writing for the band and playing our own songs. That’s when it clicked for us ... we just have as much fun as possible.”

Aldora Britain Records: And now, let’s leap forward to your current project out of Porto. The beginnings and early days of Kiko and the Blues Refugees must have been such an invigorating time. How did it all come to be? How did you meet the other members and what was the initial spark that brought you all together on a musical level?

Kiko Pereira: We have known each other for ages and have been playing with each other in different bands but never together. When we finally took that step, we felt the energy and the enjoyment of playing blues. But it started to come together when I began writing for the band and playing our own songs. That’s when it clicked for us, and we love to play our songs and to connect with our audiences. I mean, we are kind of a new band, but we are all over forty, fifty, and sixty, and we don’t feel we have to prove anything, we just have as much fun as possible. And because of our different backgrounds, we tend to blend, and sometimes bleed, into our unique sound, and that only comes with respect, knowledge, and love.



Aldora Britain Records: In 2021, you released a gem of a record entitled *Threadbare*. This is an LP I have actually only just discovered over on Bandcamp. However, I absolutely adore it already! How do you reflect on this release as a whole now, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

Kiko Pereira: Thanks for that, we are very proud of *Threadbare* because it was a child of lockdown. I felt I needed, like so many of us, to deal with the fear, frustration, and angst that came with it all. So, I wrote and wrote, and we produced the album online, sending ideas, guitar parts, keyboards, bass, and drums, that we had recorded at home and later put it together. So, we had time to consider what and how it came to be. When we finally recorded, we had a pretty good idea of the sound we were looking for. I guess, if I could, I’d change a couple of things, but it’s the same old

story, so I try not to dwell on it. Age helps you learn to let go. But I’m very happy and pleased with the outcome, it’s what we needed to say at the time.

Aldora Britain Records: It is a stellar record from top to bottom, but I would like to pick out two personal favourites. Let’s go for ‘Sugar for Your Instagram’ and ‘Giver’. For each, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer?

Kiko Pereira: ‘Giver’ I began working on early on and was actually inspired by a poem from James Baldwin. It ended up taking a dark turn, reflecting the urgent need for kindness, support, and generosity during the whole COVID experience. I couldn’t shake the vibe that made me wonder how it would sound if Curtis Mayfield sang it, so I went all in and gave it my best shot.

‘Sugar’ came to life after a wild night at an exhibition party. I stumbled upon someone sipping pink wine and snapping selfies left and right. What intrigued me was the stark contrast between the empty stare and unhappiness between shots, juxtaposed with the radiant expression during. I couldn’t resist following this person around to delve into the depths of that obsession. And well, the song practically wrote itself. The journey was as captivating as the lyrics, revealing a tale of highs and lows in the world of glamour and self-presentation.

Aldora Britain Records: Our paths first crossed when you released the fantastic ‘Doktor Doom’ single in 2023. This is a tune that I still like to spin excessively loud whenever I can! It is a true gem from The Blues Refugees. Thank you for

“I usually have the song in my head when we start, but I’m totally open to mistakes and blunders. They’re like messages from your unconscious self or the muse. You have got to be ready to listen.”

the music! What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing this track, and how would you say you have grown and evolved as a band since *Threadbare*?

Kiko Pereira: Well, thanks! We had a blast with that one. The concept is pretty straightforward... imagine facing bloodthirsty despots, a sadly common scenario these days. What would I say if given the chance? It boils down to simple questions and our refusal to succumb to hatred, bigotry, or any form of violence. Recording it was a hoot, though we grappled initially to nail the right tone and energy. The backing vocals and horns came later, falling into place as we pieced it all together.

I’m all about leaving the room for those bursts of inspiration that hit you in the studio. I usually have the song in my head when we start, but I’m totally open to mistakes and blunders. They’re like messages from your unconscious self or the muse. You have got to be ready to listen. Working with the band is a trip, everyone pulls in different directions until we find that sweet spot, and that’s what gives our sounds its unique flavour.

I wouldn’t say we evolve, but we sure develop a distinctive approach to each song. Since I’m usually the producer, with everyone tossing in their two cents, I guide the guys back to the core idea that sparked the whole thing. It makes for a more intense musical experience, at least in my book.

Aldora Britain Records: As you well know by now, I adore that Blues Refugees sound and your approach to making music. The very best elements from blues, jazz, rock and roll, and soul. How would you say this style of yours came about, what goes into it for you, and who are some of your biggest influences and inspirations as a band? I have a feeling it could be quite a broad selection.

Kiko Pereira: I’m all about soaking up every kind of music, no boundaries. One of my earliest influences, kickstarting my musical journey at like nine or ten, was Frank Zappa. His wild way of blending styles into this bizarre musical journey and the humour hooked me. My sister had a *Zappa in New York* tape that I practically wore out.

In my teens, it was all about rock and metal. Deep Purple, Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Metallica. I started in some garage bands with friends. Then soul got a hold of me. Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield, James Brown, Donny Hathaway. The melodies, the vocals, the sounds, man, I was in love. Punk, grunge, jazz, blues, hip hop, you name it. I’m always searching for something special, from ABBA to ZZ Top. So many heroes, man, I could talk about them forever.

And don’t even get me started on Brazilian and Latin music. Chico Science and Nacao Zumbi, Rita Lee, Cazusa, Jobim, Gilberto Gil, Tania Maria, Gal Costa, it never ends! Key players in shaping my rhythmic feel and groove. So yeah, it’s a mess!

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad?

Kiko Pereira: I used to have this chip on my shoulder, criticising the new ways of the world as if my generation held the key to wisdom. But then, I became a parent. Suddenly, I found myself fascinated by this ever-evolving world, this



colossal social and scientific experiment where predicting is useless. Having kids made me realise they're living in their own time, shaped by their reality, not the deep, fifty-three year old musings of their dad. So, I'm trying to walk in their shoes, showing them the ropes, and helping them navigate the craziness that surrounds us. And there has always been a whole lot of crazy going on in all directions. We just thought ours was more balanced, better, purer. Turns out, it's all BS. I've learned a ton from my kids and my students, I teach music to teens. Parenting is really like music. You have got to listen, really understand what's going on so you can react to what's happening, and not what you wished in the perfect world we seem to envision for them.

Speaking of music, the industry is not coping well with change. It pays less, sure, but now there are fewer gatekeepers. Anyone can make music and throw it out there. The whole idea of music ownership has transformed. We used to wear out our records, savouring every note. Now it's all about browsing and discovering the next big thing. That's not better or worse, it's just what it is! We should do our best to make it fairer for artists, better for the public, and inspired for future generations. No use in being aggravated all the time. We might not get through to generic radio stations that stick to chart hits, but we've got independent online radio from every corner of the globe, podcasts, and social media to get our message out into the world. Yet, there's a downside... detachment from reality, the posing, and the rhetoric.

The world keeps pivoting, and it's a bit daunting for someone like me who still believes in the power of an album, in cover art that you pour thought into. By the way, did you know we matched the blue from the *Threadbare* cover with the same blue from Coltrane's *Blue Trane* album? Yeah, I like to do deep, always something happening! Despite my occasional fear and apprehension about tomorrow, I'm holding onto hope. Hoping these new generations rise up to the occasion. Teach your children well!

Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Kiko:** That's a hard one, but I can say who inspires me? I love Tom Waits, among a long list of artists.

AB Records: Favourite album? **Kiko:** So hard! I guess if I had to pick an album that got me to think, I'd say *Joe's Garage* by Zappa. It took so long to figure out the layers, and I still discover new things.

AB Records: First gig as an audience member? **Kiko:** A Portuguese band called MiniPop back in '79.

AB Records: Loudest gig as an audience member? **Kiko:** Soundgarden and Faith No More in Lisbon, '92. It was insane.

AB Records: Style icon? **Kiko:** Can't beat Bowie.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Kiko:** I really can't not see *The Big Lebowski* whenever it's on.

AB Records: Favourite TV show? **Kiko:** *Seinfeld*. I need my daily Kramer pill.

AB Records: Favourite underground artist? **Kiko:** When you reach my age, your favourite underground acts grow and evolve, or just dissipate. But I saw Sparks this summer here in Porto and I was smiling the whole time. These guys are just so great! I guess we can still call them underground, right? Who cares? Sparks!



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Aldora Britain Records: 10 Years of Independent Music (2013-2023)

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