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[Marillion's Steve Rothery on "Happiness Is The Road"](#)

February 11, 2009



Do you remember your first math class? After being introduced to the wide world of numbers, you began learning that $1+1 = 2$; $2+2 = 4$; $2+3 = 5$; $6+3 = 9$ and so on. As well, it didn't matter if you wrote $2+3$ or $3+2$,

the answer is still five. This is known as the commutative property of addition. But for some entities, $1+1+1+1+1$ doesn't equal 5 no matter how it's written!

Such is the case with British band Marillion, when whose five individual members - vocalist Steve Hogarth, guitarist Steve Rothery, bassist Pete Trewavas, keyboardist Mark Kelly and drummer Ian Mosley - come together, they "add" up to something more than 5. As guitarist Steve Rothery confirms, "It's how you can put five musicians in a room, and the sum of the parts is so much greater than you'd expect."

Such expectations have helped keep Marillion on a singular artistic journey for nearly 30 years. When many of the band's contemporaries have called it a day, fallen back on greatest hits or just failed to keep up with the ever-changing "music" industry, Marillion have not only persevered but have seemingly thrived, thanks to a fiercely devout fan base, a willingness to embrace change and an absolute dedication to craft.

By anybody's count, Marillion have been a busy band. By the time they released 2007's *Somewhere Else*, the band had already written enough material for another album, and at the end of October 2008, unleashed the double-CD set *Happiness Is The Road, Volume 1: Essence & Volume 2: The Hard Shoulder* (my complete review can be seen on the pages of [Goldmine magazine](#)).

Happiness Is The Road is a musical pastiche, representative of what Marillion do so well, from the prog-rock frontiers of "The Man From The Planet Marzipan" across the broad sweep of "Essence" to the rumbling "Thunder Fly." *Happiness* can be seen as a statement of purpose, not just for the band members but for their fiercely devoted fans, as well. It's also an aural delight, an unbelievably rich sonic experience that reveals more detail with every listen.

Marillion guitarist Steve Rothery spoke to ClassicRockMusicBlog about the *Happiness Is The Road*, getting the right sounds, Marillion fans, his upcoming solo project and more.



Congratulations on the new album. Both discs are great.

Yeah, well it's a pleasure. The new album turned out really well. At this point, when you've made so many records you're always in danger of repeating yourself, but it turned out good.

There's a lot going on here sonically, and I don't think you can get the full impact of the music without hearing it on a good stereo system or through headphones.

Oh definitely - it makes all the difference. I think sonically, it's probably the best-sounding record we've ever made. And I think if you hear it on a good system, that really does come across.

It has a real depth and richness. Did it take a lot of effort to get that sound?

Probably more [producer] Mike Hunter than ourselves. The main technical difference is that it's the first time we recorded a record at a high bit rate and a high sample rate - 24 bit 96 kHz. It's quite a subtle difference, but there's a crispness that you get - especially at high frequencies. But even when it's dithered down to 16 bit for CD it still retains some of that extra clarity, I think.

The piano and bass sometimes sound like they're right in your room.

Yeah, definitely. I think Mike did a really good job. He's a brilliant engineer, and a lot of the credit for the record has to go to him - from an engineering point of view. We were always in a state of recording when we were doing the writing for this record, so if something great happened in the room it was then possible to use on the record. One of the most difficult things is you've got an idea - and you've got it demoed as a stereo file - and then trying to re-create these subtle nuances, grooves... even sometimes the sound that you use. It's never quite the same, so the more of the original magic you can use, the better.

Aside from writing the material itself, were there any specific musical challenges with this record?

Really, it's about not repeating yourself. You try to write something fresh and interesting to bring to a record. I think it has to be a sound you've probably heard before, but it's more like an approach or a sensibility, really. You don't want to sound too current. It's better to have a timeless quality instead of trying to sound like everybody else's records.

What makes Marillion work so well?

The magic that we create is very much down to the interaction between the five of us. That starts in the writing stage - sometimes someone will come up with a very basic idea, but how the idea bounces around the room and grows and evolves is the thing, I think, that sets us apart from a lot of other bands. We harbor that chemistry, I suppose. In terms of who writes what, that tends to change from track to track and from album to album. Sometimes I'll come in with an idea; sometimes it's Mark or Steve or Pete. It's how you can put five musicians in a room, and the sum of the parts is so much greater than you'd expect.

My thing is, it's always down to what the song requires - the way I approach playing the guitar and writing, really, is listening to what's happening, and tuning into the magic in the room and deciding what's the best part to play here. Sometimes it's more about the right choice of sounds and atmospheres as opposed to any overly technical approach.



What guitar parts or solos are you particularly proud of?

I really like playing “This Train Is My Life” and “Asylum Satellite #1.”

Those are actually my two favorites. How did you get the guitar sounds on “Asylum Satellite”?

My main guitar is a Blade, a Blade Stratocaster. On that song, I use a Hughes & Kettner Rotosphere, which is kind of like a Leslie-type effect. It gives it a great, sort of, warble. I use various amps and sound boxes. My main amp is a Groove Tubes Trio preamp and a 275 power amp. That’s kind of what I’ve used on all the albums since *Anoraknophobia*. There’s various bits of equipment, but there are some that are my first choice, and the Rotosphere is one of them. The other one is the Roger Linn AdrenaLinn pedal, which I use quite a lot on the new record. Some stuff that you might think are keyboards is the guitar through this pedal - that’s a really, really cool pedal. You can synch up to MIDI, so when we do these backing tracks - they’re usually to a tempo map - so it’s giving you this fantastic groove and atmosphere, just right in the pocket of the rhythm. That’s in the writing and recording stage. It’s a great box.

And “Asylum” has that real spacey sound, too.

Yeah. It’s always a great one to play live, as well. It’s a point in the set where I can actually just improvise. Every night it’s different. Some nights it’s great [laughs], other nights maybe not so great. There’s always sort of a moment of danger and panic when you get to the point where you really don’t know what you’re going to play next. [laughs] It’s good. It keeps me awake. [laughs]

Steve Hogarth writes all the band’s lyrics, and he keeps getting better with each album. Do you or the other guys make suggestions about the words he presents, or do you just leave them alone?

We pretty much leave them alone. If there’s something that he writes that we don’t like, we’ll usually say so, or tell the producer so he can tell him. [laughs] You don’t want to upset the singer - they’re such fragile creatures. [laughs] We share so much in terms of what we think is great - both musically and lyrically - that’s almost never been a problem. Yeah, I do think Steve writes some amazing words. In a way, the next record’s going to be quite a challenge for him because he’s kind of used an awful lot of what we’ve had on the shelf for the last couple of albums. So, yeah, he needs to go traveling the world for six months, I think, to write another album’s worth. [laughs]



The first disc opens on a very quiet note with “Dreamy Street,” more like a musical miniature. What’s the process for how the songs were sequenced?

That really only comes about in the later stages, once the album has sort of taken shape. We try different running orders, and we had the luxury with this album of having two different albums to choose which songs make the most coherent statements on each record. They almost choose themselves to a certain extent - it’s incredible when you’ve found the running order, and after awhile it’s the only way you can imagine. That wasn’t the case until about a month before the record was finished.

I think “Essence” is *the* track from these two discs. Could it be the ultimate Marillion song?

The ultimate Marillion song - that’s hard to quantify, really. I think it’s a great song. There’s a lot of great songs on both the albums. I don’t know if it’s the best Marillion song ever - that’s hard to say. In the same way, is it the best Marillion album ever? For some people, *Afraid Of Sunlight* is the strongest collection of individual songs we’ve ever done. Some people like *Brave*; some people like *Marbles*. This album has had amazing reviews all around the world, so I think it’s up there, but any particular song comes down to personal choice of favorites.

I think it’s a great song. “This Train Is My Life,” “Asylum Satellite #1,” and “The Man From The Planet Marzipan,” “Happiness Is The Road” and “Essence” are probably my favorites.

“Thunder Fly” has a great groove.

It’s good. It’s something different for us, having that slightly Doors-y intro. It’s cool; it’s a fun track to play.

The instrumental “Liquidity” is another favorite of mine. It’s got a very spiritual, almost hymn-like feel. It’s beautiful.

Yeah. It’s one of Mark’s [Kelly] pieces. During the writing of the record, we all got to do our own bits and pieces. It’s one of the things Mark came up with. It’s a lovely piece of music.

The title track, “Happiness Is The Road,” took me awhile to get. The opening keyboards remind me of Brian Eno and his ambient works, but now I can’t imagine the song without it. Are there songs that take time to sink in for you and fully appreciate?

Sometimes it's only when you've toured a song that you can get inside its skin. You can play a song as you're writing it and not really get it yourself. I think it's only with time, sometimes, does it kind of make sense. The more you play a song live, the more you explore it in a way - you find the little nuances and subtleties to add to it. Once you take that song out in front of a live audience you still evolve it further to a certain extent.



By doing that, can you get close to hearing a song from a fan's perspective?

I don't know that you can ever hear it from a fan's perspective - you're too inside it. Your own perspective of your own music is always that kind of viewpoint where you're looking at it through the other end of the telescope. [laughs] It's a curious thing, really. Sometimes you can sit back and enjoy your music and kind of listen to it, but quite often you've heard those songs so many times - you've played them so many times, especially by the end of the three-month tour. You need a bit of time away from it to actually be able to absorb it in that kind of third-party manner.

You'll soon be doing the Marillion fan weekend shows, which require presenting a huge amount of material. How do you remember six or seven hours worth of music?

[laughs] It takes a lot of hard work. It's like your brain can only hold so many songs, especially when you reach a certain age it becomes increasingly harder to remember things. [laughs] But we do pretty well. I think it was harder for the last conventions we played because we each chose two songs, and some of those were a bit obscure - there was quite a lot of homework involved.

I wanted to touch on the *Somewhere In London* DVD. The audience participation during those shows is incredible.

I think we have probably one of the best audiences in the world, really. People who get this music, totally get it. It's not just, "Hey, I've got something to listen to while I do something around the house." It's music that really absorbs you, and you tend to find that the people who come to the conventions are like a distillation of the people that feel the strongest, almost, about what you do - and at the concerts, as well. It's just a great, great audience that we have. There's not many bands that I've seen that have anything approaching that level of response and respect that we get from our audience.

There's some remarkable footage at the end of the DVD where someone requests "Sugar Mice," then you switch guitars and start playing, and the audience sings the entire song like one giant voice. And then you go into "Easter," and the response is the same. It's very moving.

I know. It's absolutely amazing. We have a great audience. On the last tour we did there was a lot of great shows, but there were probably three that were absolutely mind-blowing - that we'll always remember. And to still have that after touring for 27 years - since we first recorded for EMI - to still get that sort of response is an amazing achievement, I think.

Did you collect records growing up?

Yeah. I mean, I didn't have that much money - I spent most of it on guitar strings, probably. But, yeah, I had the Pink Floyd albums and various other artists: Camel, Genesis and some others.

Was there a particular record or song that made you want to play guitar?

Yeah. I always wanted to be a musician, but when [Pink Floyd's] *Wish You Were Here* came out - listening to that on the beach in Whitby - a small fishing town on the northeast coast of England, where I grew up - I thought, "This is it. This is what I want to do with my life": to create something that magical. So, yeah, that's kind of when I decided what I wanted to do with my life.

If you could take one year off from Marillion and pursue a specific guitar interest or style, what would you do?

I honestly don't know. A year off from Marillion, ah that's a joke. [laughs] I do other things outside the band. I'm just finishing up a project called *The Wishing Tree*, with a female singer [Hannah Stobart]. And that stylistically is quite different than Marillion. That's something I wanted to do - I'm doing everything now. I'm playing keyboards and bass, and I've recorded it, produced it and arranged it. It's been a huge amount of work, and there was quite a big learning curve for me. Any time outside the band, what I would probably do is find an artist, somebody to work with, and take a project and try to develop it.



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[Uriah Heep - From Very 'Eavy to Wake The Sleeper](#)

January 23, 2009

Check out this three-way discussion covering the entire Uriah Heep catalog. *Skull Sessions* host Bob Nalbandian is joined by my friend and metal expert Martin Popoff and former publishing editor of *Metal Rendezvous* magazine John Strednansky. The trio talk about Heep records from *Very 'Eavy Very 'Umble* up to the latest release, *Wake The Sleeper*.



The image shows a digital player interface for a track. On the left is a circular logo with a skull and a speaker, surrounded by the text 'SHOCK WAVES SKULL SESSIONS'. On the right, the text reads: 'ROADRUNNER RECORDS', 'Artist: Shockwaves Skull Sessions', 'Track: Ep 17 Easy Livin', and 'Album: The Shockwaves Skull Sessions'. At the bottom, there are 'PLAY' and 'EMBED THIS' buttons.

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[Heartwood - Robert Hudson & Tim Hildebrandt revisit “Nothin’ Fancy,” a “lost” Southern Rock belle](#)

January 13, 2009



The 1970s were, for many, the glory days of Southern Rock. All across the south great music could be heard from bands such as The Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Outlaws, Atlanta Rhythm Section, Wet Willie, Marshall Tucker Band and many more. Of those bands that “made it,” dozens more enjoyed a run of regional popularity, soaking up the applause in back-road bars, juke joints and clubs. One such band was Heartwood, whose drummer Robert Hudson’s [Web site](#) provides the following history on the seven-piece country-rock outfit.

“Heartwood formed in Greenville, NC, in early 1972. The band was originally called The Band from Clayroot which was a little crossroads outside of Greenville. We recorded our first album in a studio in Baily, NC. It was at that time that we changed our name due to pressure from the record company that was concerned about the ‘obvious’ sexual connotation of the word clayroot. We played throughout North Carolina. Just after releasing the album, it was bought by GRC Records based in Atlanta. Their new A&R guy decided that the record should be re-recorded at their new studio in Atlanta. We went in the studio and recorded all the tracks and the ‘new’ Heartwood album was released. Our management company, also located in Atlanta started booking us in Georgia and Alabama a lot so we decided to move to Athens, GA. to be closer to our record company and the new area of gigs. Our third album, *Nothin’ Fancy*, was produced by Paul Hornsby who also produced all the early albums of Charlie Daniels and Marshall Tucker Band.”

Heartwood packed ’em in at Texas roadhouses and Carolina clubs, playing their blend of country-fied rock, showcasing six harmony vocalists and seven sure-footed musicians - Byron Paul (guitars/vocals), Carter Minor (harmonica/vocals/percussion), Tim Hildebrandt (guitars/vocals), Robert Hudson (drums/vocals), Gary Johnson (bass/vocals), Joe McGlohon (pedal steel guitar/alto sax/guitar) and Bill Butler (keyboards/dobro/vocals). Their musical joie de vivre runs through *Nothin’ Fancy* tunes such as “[Lover And A Friend](#),” “[Is It My Body Or My Breath](#)” and “[Rock N Roll Range](#).”



Like every band that took a couple steps toward stardom, Heartwood were dealt the inevitable blows that knocked them back and finally out of the ring for good. But that wasn't before the release of the fine, aforementioned album *Nothin' Fancy*, the recording that first brought the band to my attention. I caught up with drummer/singer Robert Hudson and guitarist/singer Tim Hildebrandt for an exclusive interview to get Heartwood's story and learn more about *Nothin' Fancy*.

I want to talk to you guys about *Nothin' Fancy* overall, but I want to go back a little bit before that and get some more background. Robert, my first question is when did you start drumming and who were your influences?

Robert Hudson: Well, when I first started drumming I was probably in elementary school and I didn't know enough about drummers to know who I was influenced by. I just knew that I wanted to play the drums. But...I'm just trying to think...I remember there were two major kind of awakenings that happened for me when I was a kid playing. And one, was a song...I was in the high school symphonic band, and we played this one tune...and I can't really tell you too much about it but the percussion had...it was almost like a melody line... it was a part that made sense in this piece of music...so that was a real eye opener for me, because before that I'd always saw the drums as just kinda playing along and I didn't really see it as having kind of its own voice, it was just more to play along with other people.

I remember I had my first set of drums and I had them setup in my room, I guess I was in high school at the time.... And I was listening to a - must have been a *Peter Gunn* album, Henry Mancini album, *Peter Gunn* - and I was listening to the drum part in that, and there was just this one little thing, the bongos of all things, played... and then later on in the song they repeated that same phrase but they did it in a different pitch, so it was a lower pitch, and it was the first time that this was like a... this is a musical thing and they actually, there was statements they were making and they repeat 'em, but they don't repeat 'em the same way, they do 'em, ya know, a little differently, and that was like...that meant a lot to me when those two things happened - that song and then marching, and then orchestra, which was really a jazz album.

But as far as drummers as I was influenced by, who would that be? Probably would have been...when I was growing up that was in the late '50s and stuff...and so I listened to Buddy Holly and people like that and all the stuff that was on the radio so I listened to those drummers, although back then I didn't have a clue of who they were or anything. I guess the first time I was really aware of drummers was probably The Beatles. And

then...when you went to my site on my left hand side there was all those different bands I was in. And the one, the first one under drummer - the band called The Studs – what we used to do, we did a lot of Holly stuff so besides Ringo, their drummer, I really listened to him a lot and liked what he did. So, I guess those are mainly the people I really listened to. For the longest time I really shied away from listening to other drummers. In my old ego, or whatever, I thought, ya know, I needed to makeup my own parts instead of being a tape recorder and playing what other people are playing. Ya know? But in the long run I probably would have been a lot better drummer, had I not done that, had I got a lot of influences early on and then picked and chose and kind of blended those together to what I feel....

There's a lot to be said for kind of finding your own sound, too.

Hudson: When I play, everything that I play is really is just based on what the other musicians are doing, I mean, I cannot stand to play by myself or to practice really because there is nobody to play with and I get bored really quickly. Probably the strongest thing about me is not that I'm a great technician or whatever, but I do have a good ear and I listen really well and I can follow along with most people...not jazz...but rock or folk rock or whatever, that kind of stuff. And it pretty much sounds like I know the song, playing with whoever I'm sitting in with at the time or whatever just because I do listen well. So, anyway, that's kind of my background for drums and how I approach it.

Do you remember what your drum setup was for Nothin' Fancy?

Hudson: You mean as far as the drum themselves? What I had and everything?

Yeah, what you were playing, what kind of drums, ya know...were you a Ludwig guy, or a Slingerland guy?

Hudson: Well, the first set of drums that I got, I got when I was in Warm. And I had them through Warm into Heartwood. And then when Heartwood...when they got us to come to Atlanta they gave us a bunch of money to buy new equipment and stuff and I wanted some Rogers drums. So, I got some oversized Rogers drums that I played through the rest of the time in Heartwood. And I'm pretty sure that I actually used my own drums in the studio as opposed to...like when we went to Nashville and did the recording, the demo recording, we just used their equipment. We used our guitars but we used their amps and their drums and all that kind of stuff. But, I'm pretty sure when we did *Nothin' Fancy* I actually used my drums for that, if I remember correctly.

The first band that I was in, well, really did much in, the band called The Studs, I actually had bought a set of Rogers and I was working in a music store in Salisbury, North Carolina, where that band was from. And I bought a really nice set of Rogers drums that I really loved and I remember the guy that I worked with, he was an older guy, a jazz player, and he said, "Ya know, all the jazz players are getting 18-inch bass drums, that's what you should get." So, that's what I did. But I really loved that set of drums. And then when The Studs broke up I couldn't afford the payments anymore. So I knew this lady who was a percussionist at Catawba College, and I asked her if she wanted to take over the payments because she was a great drummer and played all kinds of stuff. And so, she said she would. So, anyway, about six or seven years ago, turns out she's living in Chapel Hill and she now has arthritis so bad she can't play at all. But she ended up giving those drums back to me, so I've still got those same set of drums that I had in 1965.

Wow. Hold on to those.

Hudson: She had played them so little they still had the original heads on them and everything. It was pretty cool.

Yeah. Roger's kinda hold a special place in my heart because the company was based in Ohio and that's where I grew up...Interestingly enough, Yamaha, has reintroduced that brand now. So, Rogers is back, sort of, in existence. They offer a couple entry level kits, but they're still available now.

Hudson: Well, I know, at that point back in the late '60s Rogers was just about the best drum on the market. And then they must have got bought out by somebody and the quality just went south. And then everybody quit buying the stuff and somebody ended up with the name obviously, but that's cool to know that...I hadn't

heard that Yamaha was going to put that line out again. But they were really good and I still love playing those drums.

You asked about somebody who influenced me...and I don't know how much this guy influenced me...and this wasn't until the late '70s but do you know Bruce Cockburn, from Canada?

He's one my favorite songwriters.

Hudson: Well, his drummer, he had about ten albums in Canada before he ever released one in America. And the first one was that album with "Wondering Where The Lions Are." Well, the drummer on that album was Bob DiSalle. And, he to me...had I been a really good technically great drummer I would have played like Bob DiSalle plays. I mean I'm certainly nothing like that, I'm no where near that. But he was like, to me he was like...that's what I want to do. If I was that good, that's what I'd be playing. So, I'd say, he's probably the person I like the best and to some extent influenced me. But, I really like him a lot. It was cool because they were playing at NC State and I went up afterward with my son, who was maybe two at the time, and after the show was over I went up and started to talking to Bob because I really like his drumming so much. And we kind of...he was real friendly and stuff. He had a son named David, my son's named David, both the same age and everything, we kind of got along. And we went up to a couple other gigs that they played and I talked to him again and stuff. And anyway, sometime later, maybe in the next year or two, I had a subscription to *Modern Drummer Magazine*. So I wrote an article to whoever there, I mean, I wrote a letter to somebody there. And I said, "ya know, there's this drummer that I really love that you guys outta do a feature on. His name's Bob DiSalle and he's playing with Bruce Cockburn." A couple months went by and I never heard anything and I kind of just forgot about it. Well, one day I'm at home in Durham...when I was living in Durham, North Carolina...and I get this phone call and danged if it isn't Bob DiSalle. He called me and he thanked me because *Modern Drummer Magazine* ended up doing an article about him because of that letter that I sent. And what happened is I had a subscription and my subscription ran out and I didn't renew it. And the very next month was the month where his article was in. and so, I went down to the local music store where they had that issue and I opened it up and it started off, "a reader in the southern part of the United States," da da da. And that was like one of the highlights of my life, ya know, because I wrote this little letter they were doing this article on this drummer that I just thought was the best thing since sliced bread.

Very cool.

Hudson: Yeah, that was definitely a very cool thing that happened to me. But, ya know, I really like doing that kind of thing...getting people together. I've played with so many different people that every once in a while when I get the chance I get people together that don't know each other because I just feel like these guys will get along well, musically, and just socially and everything, ya know? So, that's something that I really like doing now. I'm the one who organized the whole Heartwood 25-year reunion or whatever it was, must have been 25 year reunion. Things like that. I just got back in August. I went down to Florida for about five days and The Studs had a 40-year band reunion concert that we did. And we hadn't seen each other in forty years and it was just wonderful. It was like everybody was just the same...everybody had the same laughter, the same mannerisms and all this stuff. And nobody, basically, had seen each other in 40 years and we just had a great time. Just a great time together.



Tim, when did you first starting playing guitar and who influenced you along the way?

Tim Hildebrandt: OK, I go way back so I'm just going to probably end up dating myself. I actually started playing guitar, gosh, I actually started playing guitar professionally when I was 16 - way back when. The real influence, I guess for me, started out when Elvis Presley and them came along. And both of my parents couldn't stand it. So, I knew there was something going for it at that point in my life. And then I learned harmony, actually singing, really, well, from the Everly Brothers. And I heard Neil Young, and I heard two guys singing and I didn't know what harmony was at that point. And it was interesting, I knew they were doing two different things so I tried to copy both parts. So I got involved in that. Then, of course, I got in to the R&B stuff after that. It was that time of the Bobby, the Bobby Songs, I call 'em. This music was at like a dead standstill so I started following R&B stuff, ya know, black stuff. And that was great, then, of course, then The Beatles came along, and that was where I completely got mesmerized with the stuff. And...all on that route...and then... somewhere along the line in the early '70s I saw a band outta Macon, Georgia, and they're called Cowboy, I don't know if you've ever heard of 'em?

Yeah. I've got one of their albums actually.

Hildebrandt: Yeah, [guitarist] Tommy Talton. They came to the show at the school I was...East Carolina University, in Greenland, North Carolina. And, I saw them, and they were doing, ya know, the country-rock thing and I thought it was great because I'd also had been involved in a lot of folk music, because when I started playing by myself I had to learn how to play finger style guitar and kinda make the sound larger. I started doing a lot of that folk music stuff. They were kind of like the bridge between folk music and country music and rock, and I thought, "This was great stuff." And that's pretty much where the Heartwood stuff, ya know, that influence, to start to write like that, I guess

Were you approaching the guitar then as more as more of a songwriting vehicle, or were you trying to be a lead player as well?

Hildebrandt: No, well, when I started out, it was simply a tool to write. I actually wrote my first song when I was 17 years old. I got up with a guy from North Carolina who was a song writer, which back in those days, it was not really.... a lot of people were doing it. And I kinda learned that craft, somewhat from that guy. And so I used the guitar as a tool to create songs. But I did play lead guitar in several bands. But in Heartwood I was really a guitar player and basically a songwriter, singer kinda guy. So, the guitar was a tool for a long, long time. And now, I've kind of come full circle with it. Actually, I'm just in the position right now, well, I'm negotiating a song I just finished writing, uh, it's an R&B song, I do guitar solos and stuff through it. So, it kinda has gone all the way around the circle. I produced it in Nashville, had a studio there. Doing strictly like country, country rock music from like '90.... through '93 to '98. And that's where I really craft, actually crafted, songwriting skills, I think. Because it was such a competitive atmosphere there. It was like the old joke in Nashville was "How do you find a songwriter?" and the answer was, "Waiter!" They were everywhere. So, I really crafted that, and honed that skill of getting a story told in three minutes. Because in the Heartwood days, we were allowed to ramble as much as we wanted to. Ha-ha, which was fun, ya know, it was really fun.

Were you a guitar guy back then? I mean, did you have a Martin or a Gibson, or was there a guitar you lusted after? What were you playing?

Hildebrandt: Let's see, in Heartwood actually I was a Tely-man, a Telecaster - forever. That was my first...actually, my first guitar was an Esquire. And I got mad because it doesn't have, ya know, a pickup. So, I decided to get a Telecaster, and from then on I was pretty much a Telecaster man. When I started playing folk music I bought a brand new Martin D28 - still have it to this day - probably written 300 songs with that one guitar. And when I hit Heartwood, I started to play, actually, an Epiphone very similar to the one John Lennon used to play. I stuck with that forever through Heartwood days, and when I got out of that I strolled through the Gibson stuff, ya know, and I kept reverting back to the Fender stuff. There's a certain sound about the guitar that can't...I don't care, anybody that copies one or builds one they just can't recreate that. So, I've come full circle with that and I've got a '51 Tely remake from the custom shop from Fender, which looks exactly like the....I had one stolen from me.... I had a '53 or a '54 stolen from me many many years ago that I paid \$64 for at a pawn shop in North Carolina. During the years when all the G.I.s were being sent to Vietnam and they would pawn everything they had before they went. And so I would just kinda, ya know, cruise all the pawn shops and I found a '54.....'53, '54, I can't remember what it was....Tely. And it was stolen from me, so, maybe five or six years later. And when I was in Nashville, my heart just sunk because I went to a big guitar show there at the Convention Center and they had one of those there for over \$70,000.

Wow.

Hildebrandt: I was going, "Wow!" Ya know.

Speaking of Nashville, have you ever been to Gruhn's Guitars?

Hildebrandt: Oh yeah.

That's a pretty neat place.

Hildebrandt: Yeah, I used to perform at the Bluebird Café. I don't if you've heard of that.

Yep.

Hildebrandt: Like a small-weather joint. And uh, kinda scared, because when I was there, actually a guy from... most people out in the audience, of course...and this guy kept staring at me for the whole thing. And after the show, I thought, "This guy must really like the tunes or stuff." And he said, "Where did you get your guitar?" And I said, "Well, it's a Martin like that, from Greenville, North Carolina, in 1970...had it for so many years, and yada yada yada." So he says, "Do you want to sell it?" I said, "No, I don't want to sell it." Wrote my songs with it, and he says, "Well, I'll give you \$2,000 for it." Well, I'd originally paid \$500 for it, I was like "Ehhhh, naw, I'm not really interested." So he says, "how about \$3,000?" I said, "No, no I'm not interested." So he said, "Well, what do you do?" I said, "Well I have a recording studio here in west end of Nashville." And he says, "Do you mind if I come by your studio and here some of your stuff?" I said, "No absolutely, come on by." So, I didn't think much about it and the next day he comes in...staring at my guitar. He says, "I'll give you \$5,000 for the guitar." And this is in like '96, and I was going "Whoa." And I said...ya know, I gave it a second thought because I didn't have a whole lot of money at that point. But then I said, "Ya know, I really can't because um...ya know, there's too much emotion involved in this particular instrument." I had a metal guitar that I sold that I wish I had anyway. Long story short, the guy turned out he had come from Germany, he was a German guy, and he had come specifically to buy a guitar. And he was told if he wanted to buy a great acoustic guitar he went to Nashville, Tennessee and he went to Gruhn's Guitars to buy one. That's where he started, and then he came out to Greenville.....the guy just hounded me to death.

I don't know if it's your experience, but the one thing I've always found, particular with Martins for some reason, was they seem to get a lot better sounding the longer you have 'em. It seems like they really need a couple years to mature and mellow to me.

Hildebrandt: Ya know, that's right. It was funny because I can remember when I bought the guitar...it was sometime in the 1970s....but it was back in the day when guitars were actually sold, not just music stores, but

like in...gosh in like jewelry stores...

Department stores...

Hildebrandt: Department stores and stuff like that. And I went into this one place and they had, I don't know, they probably had seven or eight Martins on the wall and they were all, basically, D28s and D35s. And I played five D28s right next to each other and they all had distinctively different sounds and tones. And....trying to take the one. And you're right, as time has gone by it has really mellowed. And they're big sounding guitars. Ya know, not sold early on, ya know, you don't want to record with a Martin, you want to record with a Gibson 'cause it was small, it will fit in the mix. And has time has gone by, that's...kind of...not true. I do a lot of recording, engineering, and production, and I use my Martin on just about everything.

How did the seven members of Heartwood originally come together?

Hudson: Let's see, I was in a band called Warm and then originally it was Tim. So, Tim and Bill Butler, who was a keyboard player, and Gary Johnson were playing music together. And then that band I was in, Warm, broke up. And so, we were all living in Greenville, North Carolina, at the time and I knew them. And Tim had been married to the female singer in Warm years before. So we were kind of like a family anyway. So anyway, when Warm broke up those guys asked me if I would play with them and at that time we didn't have a record deal or anything, and as a matter of fact the band was called The Band From Clay Root because there was a little town - small little crossroads outside of Greenville called Clay Root - and that's where two of the guys were living at the time. And so, I got together and it so was Gary and Tim, and Me and Bill. And then we decided to add a lead guitar player because Tim is a rhythm guitar player and so we didn't really...Bill played guitar and he also played a lap steel. And anyway we decided to add a lead guitar player so we...Tim knew Byron Paul from Fayetteville - Tim had grown up in Fayetteville. So we got together with Byron and he fit in real well. And so we played for a while with that setup. And then...I'm trying to think of exactly how this went...I think the next person we added was Joe McGlohon, who was the pedal steel player, and he also played saxophone. And then we had a friend, Carter, who ended up being the harp player and singer in the band. He was a good friend of ours, and we actually hired him to be our roadie. And so he would come up during the shows and sing a song or two, and of course, he is so great, I mean he is just a great singer and a really fine harp player. And so we ended up asking him to join the band. And so that's how the seven of us got together.

What was the common ground, musically, for you guys? I mean, to get seven people together and to agree on anything is not easy.

Hudson: Yeah. Well, ya know, we wanted to do as much original stuff as we could. And Byron and Tim - and I think actually Carter might have written a song or two - and Joe wrote a couple tunes. But we were kind of a country rock band but we weren't really a country rock... but because we had a pedal steel everyone thought we were a country rock band. But we did sound country rock because we had the pedal steel. I don't know, we all just kind of like that same kind of style of music and it just fit together well, and ya know, one thing led to another. And if you listen to *Nothin' Fancy* and the next...what I can do if you want is I actually have *Nothin' Fancy*, the album before that, which was called *Heartwood*, and then a demo tape that we recorded in Nashville, at a studio there, that would have been our third album had we stayed together that long. And there's maybe eight songs on that and it's not the greatest quality because we just recorded it live. It's not like a produced studio album... there are other influences besides just the country rock kind of feel...there's kind of jazzy, bluesy stuff.

Tim, had you previously worked in an outfit with so many people in it?

Hildebrandt: Not with so many people, no. No, that was the first big thing. And it was fun because it started with two. And then I hired Robert. I think it was Robert and actually he did Bill, the piano player, Bill Butler. He was next. And then we signed Byron, the lead guitar player, and got him on board. Then we signed Joe McGlohon, who turned out to be an extraordinary sax player. He became the sax player for Reba McEntire. So we just kept building people up and actually the last guy we got was Carter, the black guy. And it was funny because as soon as we hired him...hire is not a good word for it anymore. We were actually just

playing, ya know, “You wanna sit in? You wanna join the band?” There was no hiring, there was no money to be offered. It was funny because, ironically, when he came on board, it was about the time when we headed for Athens, Georgia, down in that area where we live. And it was very unusual to have a black guy in the band, in an all white band.

Did that ever present any problems, particularly, since you guys primarily played in the South back then?

Hildebrandt: It did, in some cases, but it wasn't really... it wasn't really overt. I can only remember one occasion that that was an issue. And the occasion was we were living out, we had a big farm house out in the country and we all kinda lived in the same place, and, of course, we had to sneak Carter in because he was a black guy. And the lady in the farm house was probably 75 years old and she was brought up southern, and black people were not allowed in her houses and so forth and so on. And she came in and she saw Carter, and she kinda, her head reared back and we were like, “uh oh, we are probably going to get thrown out of this house.” And she turned around to me and she said, “Ya know, I don't have a problem about black people, I've worked them all my life.” Carter and I just sat there, with our, our jaws just dropped. There was no pretense behind it, I mean, she said, “That's just the way it is. I've worked them all my life.” I was like, “Whoa.” The only other sticky incidents, which became really funny is Skoots - our sound guy, our road manager - his name was Skoots Lyndon. His brother was Twiggs Lyndon, who was the road manager for the Allman Brothers. Anyway, we are eating at their house, at the Lyndon's house, for Thanksgiving. And they invited the whole band down, so we are all sittin' around the table and all these white people, and Carter's, of course, standing out like a sore thumb. And we're all sittin' there. We're all just sittin' there, kinda just praying in silence. And Carter turns around to Mrs. Lyndon, Skoot's mom, and says, “Ya know, Mrs. Lyndon, for a white lady you sure can cook.”

Ha ha ha.

Hildebrandt: Talk about breaking the ice!

Hudson: I guess we didn't go to the really really redneck areas. I mean most of the places we played, most of 'em - the towns - were fairly big, and we never really got hassled. I know the weirdest part of the whole thing was we had gone out to L.A. and we were playing in Texas, we went out to L.A. because they had this thing called Billboard...something or other, I don't remember what it was called but it was put on by *Billboard Magazine* and basically what it was for was for regional acts to play in front of a bunch of national booking agencies so people could get national booking agency deals out of the thing. So we went out there to play for that and it was weird because this one time...I guess all of us, or a bunch of us, were walking down the street, and I don't even remember what was said but we got hassled on the streets of L.A., of all places, and we had never gotten hassled by anybody anywhere. So that was so bizarre.

Tim, you mentioned that farm house. Is that where the picture on the back of the *Nothin' Fancy* album was taken?

Hildebrandt: No. I can't remember where that was taken. That was taken somewhere outside of Atlanta somewhere, I believe.

It looks like you're out in the woods somewhere.

Hildebrandt: We were actually in Atlanta - outside of Atlanta. Cause we were recording at a place called The Sound Pit in Atlanta. We did all these photo shoots for that. But the house, actually, we lived in was in a place called Clay Root, North Carolina. And actually the band started as being...it was called The Dancing Clay Root before we decided... we changed the name. Real old country farm house.

So, you guys come together, seven guys, and six of you are singers, and you are in a seven piece band to begin with....Was it challenging to work in that type of a setting?

Hudson: Well, not for me. I'm not really sure what other guys would tell you. But I thought it was great, we just kind of...we played together for several years and it got to the point where you just kind of could

anticipate what other people would do and I kind of gravitated towards certain parts, certain harmony parts, and other people would gravitate to other harmony parts just kind of naturally. It just kind of, I don't know, it was pretty organic. And it just seemed to work, I mean, there were no big fights about, "oh I want this part! Or your part sucks!" Ya know? It just kind of happened.

You mentioned earlier that one of the qualities that you brought to the group was that you are a good listener and I guess one of the things that impressed me about the music too was that with seven people in the group there still seemed to be a nice sense of space in the songs, and not sort of a trampling down of instruments just because there were seven people playing.

Hudson: Sure. Well, we kind of came up...we didn't come up with it... but we had this idea that we called it...well, I know that I'm aware of this so I think the whole band is aware of this...but we called it "focus." And it was like, the song starts and, ya know, goes along and there's choruses, and whatever. But it's like, at every point in the song, there's something that's in focus that stands out, and all the other stuff that's in the background or out of "focus," back there, and everybody kind of had their chance to do that. And I mean, I guess, we were pretty good at keeping out of each other's way so it didn't sound like a big jumble of stuff. And that just kind of happened, we didn't really have one person...that's the thing that I really liked about that band...we didn't have one person saying, "oh you gotta do this, and now you gotta play this, and now you gotta do that," everybody kind of just added their own ideas and, to me, we were like, the group was like much greater than the sum of its parts. And just the way it kind of molded together everybody was allowed to have their own ideas, ya know, and own influences come through the music and all. And that's the kind of band that I want to be in. Not one where there's like a superstar who can, ya know, knock your socks off...he's got to tell everybody what to do. It just wasn't like that. And the bands that I've cared about the most have been like that...where the musicians are pretty good musicians but what we came up with was much better than any one individual musician was.

Yeah. I think that's kind of a common thread in a lot of bands that, ya know, in many ways have stood the test of time. How would you describe the music scene in North Carolina back in the early 1970s?

Hildebrandt: Wow. It was wide open. There weren't a lot of bands like our band...back then. There were more, um... gosh what were they? Rock and Roll, sorta Rock and Roll, I guess, is the best way to approach that. But I can remember, when we first started, I started, actually started a band with myself and uh, just a bass player, and we did like little folk songs, ya know, like a little laugh scale in the college town. And then all the other bands were, ya know, like boogie bands, ya know, rock-boogie bands. And then Robert joined us, he was the third member, I think, in the band at that point and was playing percussion and singing harmonies and so forth. And that was about the time when we got influenced by Cowboy, which was, to me, was a very unique band. For that time, they were very very unique because they were touring, ya know, like The Allman Brothers, and Grinderswitch. Ya know, that ilk. And they were all doing the same thing, and all of a sudden, here comes this group, this laid-back, ya know, they were like the precursors to... The Eagles really. The way they sounded. And we kind of styled our whole gig after that, I styled my song-writing after that. I remember my first ten or 15 songs after I saw them was like, ya know, right in their, right down their, in that vein. Because I thought I was just mesmerized by that style of music. And so it was a cool niche for us to be in. I think that was probably one of the reasons we got signed to begin with because we were out of the ordinary for that period of time. In eastern North Carolina, especially.

Were there plenty of gigs for you guys?

Hudson: Yeah. I mean, we got to the point where we didn't really have to play...especially in Warm, I mean Warm, that band we would only play, after about a year, year and a half of being together...we got to the point where we could just play two nights a week, like Friday and Saturday, and that's all we had to do. I mean, we certainly weren't rich by any means, but we had enough money to live on and it was great. Just working two jobs, Friday and Saturday night, and the rest of the week was pretty much your own. I mean, we'd get together occasionally and rehearse and work up some new tunes or whatever. And Heartwood was pretty much like that, ya know, we didn't play tons of gigs. We would play pretty much every week, a couple, two or three times and then sometimes we wouldn't play at all. But, ya know, we played enough to pay

everybody's bills, I mean, all seven families could survive...it was a treat to go out and eat at McDonald's...but we could pay our bills. And ya know, we got to do what we did, and we were doing what we loved by playing music. And especially once we got with the record company in Atlanta...and we went on a couple of tours, we went basically on our own, we weren't touring with anybody, but we went on our own and it was really neat because when you go out, at least that time back then not everybody could have an album, where today anybody can by some home recording stuff and make some pretty darn good recordings. But back then, you know you go, and just because you had an album people treated you different. So, we'd tour in like Texas, or Florida, or wherever, ya know? We were out promoting the albums and stuff and it was just like because we had an album out they just treated you a little different. But, ya know, it was just nice. You'd get to a town and listen to the radio and dial in different radio stations and you'd run across one playing your song. Somebody would come out, someone from the radio station would come out and invite you out to supper and stuff like that. But it was really nice. It was a lot of hard stuff, being on the road is pretty tough. But all and all, it was a pretty good scene.

Were you guys all traveling together in one vehicle?

Hildebrandt: Yep. One vehicle. We actually had a big ol' Suburban - Chevy Suburban - and pulled a big ol' trailer behind that. And we had a road manager and a sound guy and they did...not all of the driving but a lot of it. But we all took our turns and it was one of those four-seaters: two air conditioners, one in the front and one in the back. I always wanted to get the very back so I could sit back there, put some headphones on. And we actually had this little...I can't remember what that guitar thing was back then...this tiny little...Pig Nose I guess it was called.

Oh yeah, the little amp?

Hildebrandt: Yeah, you could put the headphones on and kinda zone out...write stuff.

Were you guys making any money at all?

Hildebrandt: Naw. We were kept. They [record label] paid for our homes, they paid our rent in Athens, for our houses. They kept us fed, this, that, and the other. And ya know, some money, but nothing at all, really, zero. And when I found the bill for the album, and me being a song-writer, I had signed a bunch of stuff that I shouldn't have signed...I was just signing contract after contract. They actually called me down before we signed with that company... they flew to down to Atlanta... the president of the company took me to a concert, and he had put on the concert and The Beach Boys were the headliners and opening for The Beach Boys was a group called Mother's Finest, which was a group out of Atlanta. And opening for them was this new guy called Bruce Springsteen. So I'm sittin' here, here comes Bruce Springsteen, nobody had ever heard of him. And I'm sittin' there, of course we had great seats and I'm sittin' next to the president, and he's wining and dining me. "Who's that guy? Who's that guy?" He says, "It's Bruce Springsteen." He's opening for the opener. So, when I got back I remember telling Joe, cause Joe and I were living together, and I said, "Joe, I've seen it. I've seen it." He says, "What are you talking about?" I said, "They've got Bruce Springsteen. You won't believe it." And I actually wrote the record company, I'm not sure if it was Colombia or whoever it was, in New York, and said, "This guy, does he have a record album?" He had just put out *Greetings From Asbury Park*. And it was still local, I mean it was still regional, wasn't even out anywhere. And I ordered that and had it sent to me and I said, "This is the guy, this is what I'm telling you." And of course, a couple years later - woom.

Yeah?

Hildebrandt: It was just amazing. It was the kind of thing where... so they were wining and dining me and I'm getting blown away by all of this stuff of course. So, "Sign here?" Oh yeah, I'll sign. "What do you want me to sign?" So, I got hit for a lot of things that they were going to try to take anyway, I'll teach some song writing and put it towards my bill and all this stuff, which had I been a lawyer it turned out, ya know, knew that they couldn't do that kinda stuff. But that was way yonder, after the fact, after the band had broken up and I was trying to figure out what the next move was going to be.

The place where you recorded, the Sound Pit, what were the facilities like there?

Hildebrandt: It was huge. It was it. Yeah, it was it man. Way back then, it really was. It was good as any place in Los Angeles or New York. You know, brass fixtures in the saunas, steam rooms...just absolutely fantastic. In fact....I can't remember his name...Glenn Meadows from Nashville, Tennessee, is an engineer now, was an engineer on that album. Glenn Meadows and another guy, can't remember...somebody else. But um, he ended up, or still is, the mastering guru in Nashville. They had some heavy hitters not only working there, but their equipment was just like, the best. It really was. We'd never really been in anything like that before. The little studio we were at before was a little thing out in like the country between Bailey, North Carolina, and Raleigh, North Carolina. It was a small...you know, egg crates on the ceiling kinda deal. The other one was acoustically designed and they had grand pianos, all kinds of... mellotrons... you know any kind of instrument you needed in the studio, huge studio.



Tell me about the label you were with out of Atlanta, GRC, and what happened to them.

Hudson: Well, that's pretty interesting. GRC was run by Mike Thevis. Tom had called him the Porno King. He had evidently had made all his money...he was from, I think, Whiteville, North Carolina...he had made all his money by selling magazines like Playboy and stuff like that...I don't know if it was illegal or whatever...but he made a whole bunch of money doing that kind of stuff. And then he started making movies, pornographic movies, and stuff like that. And then he decided he wanted to have a record company, so he just spent a whole bunch of money and built a great studio in Atlanta called The Sound Pit, where we recorded the *Nothin' Fancy* album. And then...I'm trying to remember what happened...I think the Feds were coming down on him and so he was in this really bad motorcycle wreck...and I don't know how real it was or if it was just something to try to get out of going to jail or whatever. But I know for a long time that kind of kept him out of jail. And about the last thing we heard...back then...and no time recently but way back then... was that he had actually gone to jail.

This guy was pretty sleazy and we were so naïve at the time. Somebody that he had some kind of a run in with, or something, had been found stuffed in the trunk of his car. You know, "Wow," but people were just saying that kind of stuff and, of course, we were so naïve, we believed all of it. Mike's really a good guy, he was a nice guy when we were around him. Nothing weird happened. When we were living in Greenville they said, "Well, why don't you move down here because all your gigs are down here." Da da da. "you'll be close to the record company." So we said, "OK, we'll do that." And then he said, "I can give you money to help you move down here." So, the three...I think it was three wives at that time...I think we were on the road or something...and they went to meet Michael Thevis at his office in Atlanta. And we had all figured out how much money it was going to cost to move us from Greenville to Athens and I think it was like \$2,300 or something, which back then was quite a bit of money in the early '70s. Anyway, they went in there and they told him what they needed and he just pulled out this big wad of hundred dollar bills and peeled off 23, \$100 dollar bills and then he said, "Well, you sure you don't need more than that?" He was just going to give us whatever, it didn't really matter. So they got that. So that should have told us something. This guy's dealing with hundreds, and that's the way they pay for everything. So that was kind of strange. But it was interesting,

it was a nice studio and we got to meet...while we were recording there...there was actually a big studio and a small studio within this building, and so while we were recording our album some other people came in to record and we got to meet some of those people who were also with GRC at the time and that was neat. Plus, we got to do quite a few of opening acts when we were out promoting the album. A lot of the gigs were just us by ourselves, but every once in a while we would get an opening act and we would play with...I'm trying to think who we played with...we played with Asleep At The Wheel down in Austin...gosh, I can't remember the guys name... a big kinda country singer now, and the name escapes me...we played with him in Fort Worth. Ya know, things like that. And that was very cool, getting to play with people who had already kind of made it and stuff. Just move up to that next level from where we had been – just playing small clubs on our own.

When your label stopped operating, I'm surprised you guys weren't approached by another label like a Capricorn or something like that, seems like that would have been a perfect fit.

Hildebrandt: Yeah... I think it was timing. I really do. We had become disillusioned. We had started to wake up and smell the coffee as far as the label was concerned. Out in Los Angeles, the guy at the motel had actually chained our trailer to a post so we couldn't leave because we hadn't paid him yet and the money was supposed to be coming from the record company. It was at that point that...this was not good. So, literally, by the dark of night after the money was paid...I can't remember if we were going from Los Angeles or maybe to San Francisco or some place else, I can't remember where we were...somewhere on the west coast...and we hopped in the car, in the trailer everything, and high-tailed out and drove back to North Carolina.

Is that right?

Hildebrandt: We didn't call the record company until we got to... I can't remember... somewhere east of the Mississippi...because we were afraid they were gonna come down on it when we just let them know that we were not doing it anymore. And that was pretty much it...and I feel to this day, I know for a fact when I was that age I had a terrible ego, ya know. And, of course, you get pampered with a lot of stuff and your ego gets bigger...junk like that. And I think to this day if we were all smart enough and pushed all our stuff behind us, we would probably still be making music together. Because it was basically all that, and the record company that everything got intertwined there... and well we just said, "Let's just call it quits." And you know, in hindsight, you say, you put that stuff behind you, you could probably make some pretty good money. But...it wasn't meant to be.

Was that getting chained to the post... was that the first time that ever happened?

Hildebrandt: That was the only time that ever happened, but we were always calling, "Where's the money? The money is supposed to be here. It's not here," and so forth and so on. We were pretty much a kept-band. The record company pretty much did everything. We didn't know who paid the bills or this, that, or the other. Basically, we were naïve enough to not pay much attention to it. We were just, like I said, we were just as happy as could be to be doing it. We were at that level, we were just doing it, and having fun doing it.

Hudson: I guess it's just as well because, ya know, we were a little scared when the band broke up. When we decided to break up the record company was none too happy when that happened. We probably owed them... I think somebody said we owed them close to \$250,000. For all the recording time, for the money they loaned us, for all the advertising they did. So we were just wondering...Guido was going to show up at our door one day and take it out of our hide. Nothing like that happened, but we were a little scared there first.

Paul Hornsby produced that album. And he was just such a wonderful guy to work with, he was just amazing, I just loved working with him. And what happened is...Paul knew...he felt GRC was not promoting us nearly as well as they should have. And so he had actually talked to the people at Capricorn...as my understanding, I've just heard this second hand...but he supposedly talked to the people at Capricorn and talked to them about buying our contract from GRC, and for whatever reason, I don't really know what happened, but that

never did happen. But they did talk about it cause Paul liked us a lot. We got along really well and he liked our music and we really liked him and how he produced and everything but nothing came of it.

He kind of became a Southern rock legend in the producing field. What are your memories of working with him?

Hudson: Well, it's just, ya know, he wasn't in there...we had worked with a couple producers, this one guy especially. They had flown him in from Las Vegas and we met him at this little club called Grant's Lounge in Macon and he was talking, he was going to produce our album. What happened is, we recorded an album called *Wants and Needs* in a little studio in Bailey, North Carolina. And about that time Michael Thevis...what happened actually, was one of the guys that was working with our management company was Lew Childre and his dad had been a big name in the *Grand Ol' Opry*. And evidently the people at GRC wanted to sign Lew Childre. So, these people that we were working with, our management company, kind of sold us as sort of a package deal with Lew to GRC. So, anyway, so what happened is...they had a new Vice President of GRC. He came in and listened to our album and he didn't like it. And they had already put a full page ad and billboard for this album.

OK.

Hudson: And then the next week he had pulled it all off the market and said, "We're gonna re-record this at our studio in Atlanta." So we went in and re-recorded it and that's the first album, it's just called *Heartwood*. So we re-recorded that at GRC and put that out. And they promoted us a little bit but not much. And things were really not happening hardly at all for us and we weren't really sure what was going to happen. But then, a guy that was in the booking agency that was owned by the studio...somehow he knew Paul, I believe, and we were playing at a concert in Atlanta, and he invited Paul to come up from Macon and listen to the band. And Paul really liked us a lot and then it kind of went from there. And then we kind of had this revival because the record company had kind of almost kind of forgotten about us because that first album really didn't do anything. And so, anyway, we got together with Paul and it was just like, he was able to make us sound like *Heartwood* instead of *Heartwood*-produced by Paul Hornsby, ya know? To me, it was pretty transparent, it wasn't him, but he just helped us just do better. I'm probably not explaining that very well.

No, no, I understand.

Hudson: But, it was just that he wasn't in there, no big egos, "No, you gotta do this, you gotta change that," ya know? He was just very supportive and really knew how to get the best sounds out of the equipment for us and what we were trying to do. He did have the idea of us, basically, recording live in the studio, which was the way *Nothin' Fancy* was recorded. And we went back and overdubbed the vocals and some lead tracks and stuff. And we did have several friends sit in with us on the album with us, and that was done. But basically, the whole band recorded the songs instead of the rhythm section, and then we'll bring in the lead part, and then we'll bring in the vocal parts and all that stuff. And I think that...I don't know, I just like that approach and I think it had a good feel to the album from doing it that way.

If you can get everyone to agree to record that way, I think that that's the best way to record because outside of playing live, how else are you really going to show your sound off?

Hudson: Yeah. And the thing about that is, I didn't really explain it that well, its not like you go in and we're all playing at the same time, and the drums in the drum booth, and the guitar's in a small recording studio, ya know, 50 feet away...da da da... we were all in the same room playing live and everything was miked but it wasn't like everybody's separated in a small little room so there's total separation...things would bleed from all the instruments into all the mics and that's basically the way we recorded the rhythm part of that.

And I was just going to say...we were recording that...and the song, "[Guaranteed To Win](#)." We had a friend of ours from Athens that we had talked to about playing banjo on it. And Paul came in and said, "I've got this friend that I'm doing this, this album with right now. You might want to get him to play banjo for you." And we said, "well, no, we've already got our friend coming in, so we're gonna do that." So, anyway, he brings in this recording of...and it's not even been mixed really...but it's a recording of this guys band and we get to

here it and it's Charlie Daniels doing "Fire On The Mountain."

And Charlie Daniels was the guy Paul was going to get to play the banjo. Of course, we had never heard of Charlie Daniels so we had said, "No we're gonna get our friend from Athens to do that."

And that would be Buddy Blackman, then?

Hudson: I'm trying to remember, there were two of them. Buddy Blackman and there was another guy who played mandolin...

There was a Buddy and a David Blackman.

Hudson: It probably says on the back of the album somewhere, I guess, what they played.

Yeah, Buddy was the banjo guy and David was the mandolin player.

Hudson: Yeah, it's hard to remember that was so long ago. That was so long ago, that was 30-plus years ago, 33 years ago.

Tim, what are your memories of working with Hornsby?

Hildebrandt: Paul. Man, Paul was a great musician. Of course, he did all the Charlie Daniels' stuff, Marshall Tucker. And Paul and I kind of butted heads, couple times. Another reason I said - I mean, now, this is what, a hundred years ago? - but that I can remember that I wanted to double some voices, which everybody was doing...even The Eagles... just to fill this stuff up. And he said, "Ah, we're not gonna make any damn Carpenters records." We didn't do any doubling, everything was pretty much...what ya get. Paul had his way. He was strictly - you know - you get your guitar, you get your drums, and you get your bass and you play. Ya know? And you don't do any extra "stuff."

Would you say that there was something of a Southern rock fraternity back in those days?

Hildebrandt: Absolutely.

Was it easy to hook up and play with different people if you wanted to?

Hildebrandt: Yes it was. It was just so wide open then. There was really not a lot of pretenses. And a lot of those bands were geographically pretty close to each other. So, you'd see each other up and down the road. Of course, The Allman Brothers were obviously, ya know, the big stars and everything, at this point. But, you know, like I said, it was not unusual for Dickey Betts to sit down and jam. Or anybody, for that matter, would just come and sit in. And I can remember when we were out in Texas, Vassar Clements sat in with us, which to me, was like... he was God on the fiddle. It was funny because Bill Butler went out and played golf with him the next day. In all honestly, which I thought was pretty funny because I couldn't picture Vassar Clements playing golf. So, I'm sure he's not a good golfer, you know? So, it wasn't unusual to sit in... a couple people, if I'm not mistaken from... Willie Nelson's band... I think his sister or whoever it was used to play. It was just kind of a thing. It was small enough, of that kind of music, so that you saw each other in different situations a lot. You know, you weren't certainly friends, and hung out with each other at all...

One thing that sets Heartwood's sound apart from "Southern Rock Bands," or however you want to refer to yourselves...is the heavy presence of the pedal steel guitar. Looking back now, do you think you might have had some problems with the record companies who may not have been able to label you, saying, "You know, maybe you're too country for rock and vice versa."?

Hudson: Well, that's a good question, but I'm not sure I know the answer to that. I mean, we didn't really...we only dealt with GRC so we didn't really have any kind of talk with any other record companies to know if they would've thought, "Well, you guys, we want you, but you gotta get rid of the pedal steel," or whatever. I don't know, I guess that's possible. I mean, country rock was pretty, kinda happening at that time. So, my guess is it probably wouldn't have been...I mean any record company that wanted to do country rock, if they liked us, they would have picked us up. I mean, I don't really know the answer to that. Hopefully, if that had happened we would've said, "Well, no, sorry, we are going to do this, and if you like it, that's great and lets record it, but if you don't and you want us to change it, there's no point because that won't be us if

we change it.” So I don’t know really.

I want to talk about a couple of the songs on *Nothin’ Fancy*. The opening track, “[Lover And A Friend](#),” I think is one of the best parts of the album and it sort of ends up being sort of an extended suite. It really surprised me the first time I heard it because right when you think it’s ending it’s just reaching the middle point. How did that song develop?

Hudson: Well, to me, “[Lover And A Friend](#)” will always be the quintessential Heartwood song. I mean, it’s just like, it took everything that we were about. More or less all the different kind of little different styles and the sounds that we had and just kind of put them together. I remember, I don’t remember exactly how that happened... I know we were playing in Auburn, Alabama, at a little club. And we were staying in this little motel and I can just remember sitting in the motel room... some people were standing around some people were sittin’ on the bed, I would’ve been sittin’ on the bed probably playing on my knees... probably just playing acoustic guitars and stuff. And that song just kind of happened, and how all those other parts came about, to tell you the truth, I don’t even know which people wrote which parts. It was just kind of an organic thing that kind of grew and, to me, that was my favorite song. I loved playing that song with that band. All those different feels and everything. It was just one of those magical things that happened. It wasn’t really planned or anything, and I’m not sure anybody was directing it to make it happen that way. That’s just what happened in that Motel room.

Yeah. That’s how it sounds...and it’s credited as a complete band composition. It sort of has that feel as if one person is picking up where the last one left off.

Hudson: Yeah, I’d forgotten about that, but yeah, I guess that’s right. I guess it was more like the whole band wrote the song as opposed to one person wrote this part, and somebody else wrote the next part. I mean, it probably was something like that. But like I said, everybody was able to add so much of themselves that even though all of the songs, basically, are written by a “writer,” I mean, we took ’em and made ’em into Heartwood as opposed to, “OK, we’ve got this Tim Hildebrandt song, let’s do a Tim Hildebrandt song.” It’s like, we took the song by Tim Hildebrandt but made into a Heartwood song because we were allowed to do that instead of, “oh you’ve gotta do it all this way, and do it all my way,” that just didn’t happen in Heartwood, which was a great thing.

Hildebrandt: The best I can recall... parts were written by different people, specifically. Actually, Byron was pretty much responsible for where we got kicked off, you know, the uptempo portion of it. The little fingerstyle thing, which I specifically wrote as a basically... was going to be another tune. And then Carter wrote the kinda bluesy thing, created that little part. We were just goofin’ around and basically, we just started breaking it down. And it was, we were really doing that, ya know, that Tommy kind of atmosphere, but in a country-rock kinda way. We were trying to have almost like a little opera deal going on. That’s how that occurred. We were all, actually, specific different people that had written different parts and we just, ya know, got in there and decided, “That would be cool to see if we could just somehow tie them all together.” And, actually, the best part about is in the end, Carter’s line, “Gonna be your lover and your friend,” and we kicked back into the top with Byron’s part, which really kinda sealed it to me.

How would you describe the different guys in the band and their contributions? You mentioned Joe - anybody who can play the pedal steel and the saxophone is a pretty incredible musician.

Hildebrandt: Well, actually, we started because Joe, ya know, learned to play a lap steel. First of all, because we wanted one. And, basically, he was playing in another band. And he sat in and played a little lap steel. And we said, “man, this is great.” So he learned his chops on the lap steel and then progressed to the pedal steel, which, to me, was amazing. The most amazing thing about his playing style, was he never played with his fingers and picks, he played with one flat pick. He did all that with a flat pick, just like you play the guitar. Absolutely mind-boggling because all the notes were so clean and so well-done when he did that. And the funny thing about the sax part, the great story about the sax part was we were sitting in the rehearsal at that big ol’ farm house I was telling you about. And we were just doing some rehearsing and so forth and so on. And I had written some tune, I don’t remember off the top of my head which one it was, but I had written

some song, and we were sittin' around chattin' and I said, "Man, this song is dying for a sax." And Joe said, "Well I play a little bit of saxophone." And I said, "You do?" He said, "Yeah, I used to play it in high school, but you know, saxophone sucks." Because he was 18 years old at this point. He says, "Saxophones are not cool... guitars are cool." So, I said, "Just bring it to the next rehearsal and let's just see what happens." And he came in and played the saxophone and blew everybody away. He couldn't just play a little sax, he could play a lot of sax. And from that time on, he was like, he was doing double duty with the band. He doesn't play pedal steel anymore, unfortunately. Cause he had a motorcycle accident in Macon, Georgia, riding with Twiggs Lyndon and did something to his hand, tore some, I'm not sure, some nerves or something. And he can't physically do that anymore... all the quick stuff he was doing. Well, oddly enough he did play some acoustic guitar with Reba McEntire at some point in some of the shows too. He's pretty much an incredible musician all around. Complete all-ear, ya know.

Hudson: Joe actually ended up - after playing in bands in Richmond and wherever - he ended up being the sax player for Reba McEntire. He became just a phenomenal sax player. He's one of those musicians that can pretty much pick up anything and play the Dickens out of it, really well, with a great touch. And that's what he played for Reba McEntire. He was actually in the band... they were going to a gig somewhere and the band's plane crashed and killed everybody in the band. And it's my understanding that at the last minute Joe decided to fly with the sound crew in a different plane that day... probably because they had some great pot or something... ha ha ha. But oh man, it's pretty amazing.

Wow. And he can't play pedal steel anymore?

Hudson: I know that... it must have been about five to seven years ago we had a Heartwood reunion in Durham and everybody was able to come, all seven people were able to come. And Joe had borrowed a pedal steel to play, but I don't think he had played pedal steel probably since Heartwood had broken up. He lives in Nashville now, I think. He plays with... oh what's his name? A couple people... oh shoot, people you would know. He plays with them, he goes out and tours with them, so he's still doing that.

What's the deal with motorcycle accidents in Macon?

Hildebrandt: I don't know. The thing was he was with one of the Allman Brothers people, it was strange, it was really bizarre. That would be Joe's slant on the band as far as his musicianship. Of course, Carter came, the black guy came, completely raised on R&B stuff. The first time I heard him play the harmonica I was just... it just killed me. It was great. Because he could play a country harmonica if he wanted to but he was really deeply engrossed in the blues stuff. And when we played in Macon several times we actually had some of the Allman Brothers sit in with us and some of the Wet Willie and some of those guys. And so we would have these jams that... I can't remember the name... this little black club, I can't remember the name of it anymore. But I remember Carter coming in... Jimmy Hall came in. Jimmy Hall used to wear a belt... You know Jimmy Hall? You know who I'm talking about? He's actually the lead singer for Wet Willie.

Oh yeah.

Hildebrandt: And he played the harmonica. And he used to wear a belt, which looks like a cartridge belt, I guess. And he had his little harmonicas all around it. He's a pretty fair harmonica player. But we showed up and Carter came in and Carter had a bandoleer. And got up there and just proceeded to blow the whole place away, and Jimmy was just sittin' there with his mouth hanging open. It was really a fun thing. Butch Trucks was on drums, I remember, Jim was playing some percussion. Robert was playing drums, Byron, the guitar player, was playing guitar. Jimmy Hall was playing. I wanna say Dickey Betts was on the other guitar. It was some great stuff. Further along, I guess back to your original question, of course, Byron was a really young kid at that point, the lead guitar player. And I saw him, actually his brother, played bass with me years before that, his older brother. I can always remember when Bobby and I would rehearse at his house, Byron was probably only seven or eight years old.

Oh, wow.

Hildebrandt: And he was like the little brother, we'd kick him out, "Get outta here kid." And he ends up

playing guitar in the band which was really neat. I saw him at a club years later before we asked him to join the band and I went, "Whoa, look at this guy, this guy really knows his stuff." So...Heartwood, we had a lot of...we did a lot of shtick too when we performed. We had jokes...we were a lot of like Statler Brothers' kind of entertainment when we performed, which I wish we had a tape of that stuff because we did a lot of routines and, ya know, all kind of just beat up stuff besides just playing.

On *Nothin' Fancy*, Joe's got a couple of these short little, sorta almost like a Bob Wills-type things. Is that kind of stuff he would do up on stage? Would he improv stuff like that?

Hildebrandt: Oh, absolutely. In fact, we even did...gosh I can't remember. It was a routine done by...Hog...shoot I can't remember... Road Hog...Byron went through this whole thing and I was Wichita...this whole thing. And for five minutes there would be no music. And just all kind of stuff just like that. We picked up a lot of that when we went to...I guess we were in Houston, or actually Austin. We performed with Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jew Boys. And Kinky Friedman, they were major shtick. And I remember we were opening for them in Houston and I had never seen them before...they were opening for us, excuse me...and they were up there and we were getting ready to go on and we were watching them and the lead guitar player was playing with his pedals, and he was leaning back on the pedal and all of a sudden he just bellied over...just on to his back. And the whole band stopped, and I mean, everyone just takes a huge gasp in the audience. And he jumps up...ha ha ha... and starts playing... I just thought, "This is great." And the final song was some little song about America this or America that. And the drummer has drum sticks that actually an American flag would pop out at the end, so at the end he's waving the flag and hitting the cymbals, it was... this was good stuff here. So we did a lot of that, not as much as they did, but that was kind of one of our performances as I recall.

What can you tell me about Bill and Gary's playing?

Hildebrandt: Bill, interestingly enough, when he started out he didn't know anything about the dobro. And he just picked it up and he became a really sweet dobro player. And just kinda like Joe, he played piano and school but the piano wasn't cool, ya know. He learned to play piano in piano lessons and so forth. And then he started bangin' around on the piano and back then the country rock stuff... the piano was a lot of fill stuff... it wasn't a lot of real heavy-duty things. And it just kind of made a really nice fit, for some reason, it just fit. But I liked his dobro playing as much as I liked anything he ever did. He had a beautiful dobro and a beautiful technique. And the tone was always so good on it. Gary was a funny guy. Gary and I went to college together and that's where Gary and I started playing, when I was in college this where all of this started. Gary and I played together... he was roommate or, suite-mate actually at East Carolina. And Gary didn't play an instrument at all, but he was a brilliant person, he was like a straight-A student. And I'd sit in my room across from him and just play my guitar. And he said, "I'm gonna get a bass and just kind of sit in with you." And I thought, "Oh, well, OK, whatever." And he didn't really have much of an ear, but he had this incredible ability to learn stuff by kind of a numbers method.

Really?

Hildebrandt: And once you got going, he could hit every single note. It was really funny to me because he was coming from the completely opposite end of the spectrum that I was. I was coming completely from the ear... grab a guitar, make some sounds, come out of it, and go on about your business. And he was coming like almost like a writer, an old time writer, it's like a numbers theory for him. So, that's the way he kind of approached stuff. And of course, Robert - he's a really fine percussionist period - and not a bad acoustic guitar player and a great harmony singer.

Yeah. You guys kind of had an unusual setup there with so many possible voices in the band.

Hildebrandt: Yeah, and that was really fun because I can remember we would start off the shows with "Bonaparte's Retreat," I don't know if you know that song. But "Bonaparte's Retreat" was basically a three-part harmony thing and we would get up there without our instruments and we would start off the thing with seven people singing it. Which was really, really, really nice. It kind of was shocking, because you open the curtains and you would think someone was going to slam out their tune and we would just be standing in

front of the stage. That's how we started our shows. It was so much fun to have seven people that could actually find a note and get in there somewhere.

Another song on here that really stands out is “[Sunshine Blue](#),” and you had mentioned earlier about Carter’s harp playing, which I think is evident throughout this album - it’s superb. I know it’s a longer song, but was there any talk about ever making it a single, or were any of these songs considered for singles, on *Nothin’ Fancy*?

Hudson: Well, actually, they did put out “[Home Bars And City Lights](#).” Which is you know, the most folky sounding song of the whole lot. Oh, that was the second single they put out. The first single they put out was “[Guaranteed To Win](#).” That’s the one that Paul really felt should have been a hit. I mean, it’s a nice song, it’s not a great song, but it’s a nice song. He just felt, that had GRC had promoted it correctly, it could have gotten us national recognition, which of course it didn’t. So, that’s part of the reason why he wanted Capricorn to buy us because he knew that GRC wasn’t doing right by us. But the thing that I really liked is on “[Satan And Savior](#),” Carter and Joe play harmony parts and Joe is on sax and Carter is on harp, and they sound so good together. I don’t know if you noticed that part but that’s actually saxophone and harmonica doing those two parts.

Tim, “Home Bars” and “Sunshine Blue” are both your songs. What do you remember about writing them?

Hildebrandt: “[Home Bars And City Lights](#)” was before we were getting ready to go out on tour...one of the tours. I mean, we had been on the road and we were home. And we were getting ready to go again. And I thought about all these places we had been, and so forth, and we were getting ready to go back out there again, but ya know, it’s like home bars...was not our home, but home for whoever’s town you were in. And that’s where that came from...it’s one of those kinds of songs. And it got to be, I think it was made number one in a couple towns out there in Texas. It was great because it was the first time, I remember, we pulled into some place, maybe Dallas or some place, and we turned on the radio and it was playing on the radio, which was obviously a thrill...to hear your own song on the radio. “[Sunshine Blue](#)”: Can’t be much said about it, except that it’s one of those songs where you tell your girlfriend goodbye. You’re going back on that road again.

How did Ruby Mazur come to do the album design on *Nothin’ Fancy*?

Hudson: Let’s see. The first album cover for Heartwood, not the Wants and Needs, but the one we re-recorded in Atlanta...the people, I think it was the graphic arts artist company from Capricorn... they were called Kitty Hawk Graphics, I believe. And they did the Heartwood album cover and I think it was the same people, I’m not positive, but I believe that it was the same people that did both of those album covers.

OK.

Hudson: Now, how they actually got up with Kitty Hawk Graphics to do the first Heartwood album cover I don’t really know. But I love that album cover. The *Nothin’ Fancy* cover, I think is just a great album cover....And I don’t know if it’s just me or whatever, but occasionally I’ll put that Heartwood album on, and to me, I’d like to get other people’s opinions, but to me, that album doesn’t sound all that dated like a lot of stuff. And probably the first Heartwood album would sound dated. You could say, “Oh yeah, that’s definitely from the ’70s,” or whatever. And maybe some songs on there did sound like that, but I think some of the songs don’t sound much dated at all.

Why do you think that is?

Hudson: Well, I’m not really sure I know the answer to that. But to me it’s really a nice little thing. But, of course, I don’t even know if people agree with that. But that’s just the way it feels to me when I listen to it. It just doesn’t seem all that dated.

It's like a bunch of guys sitting around on a back porch just playing music because they love to play.

Hudson: Yeah, and I think that's probably Paul went for us recording all in one big room...all the drums and all the amps in one room...to have that kind of feel to it. It's just a bunch of guys that love to play getting together and playing together as opposed to, "Oh we're going to go into a studio and see how technically advanced we can make this sound," or whatever, ya know?

Sure. Robert, you mention on your [Web site](#) that Charlie Daniels and Toy Caldwell were going to appear on the band's next album. Had you guys been writing or playing with them or were they just were going to kind of show up and help you?

Hudson: No, Paul would've produced the next album and he knew those guys and he would've probably talked to them about being on the next album. But we didn't really know them or get to play with them or anything like that.

What finally broke Heartwood up?

Hudson: There was one point...we got together in Greenville and then we moved to Athens, Georgia to be close to the record company that was in Atlanta because once they started booking us and stuff most of our gigs were down in that area: Atlanta, Alabama, ya know, all in that area, so we moved down there. And at one point, I guess, we had been in Athens, maybe a year or something and people started talking, "well, lets think about moving to a different place." And there was a neat little town up in the mountains of Georgia, I think it's...I want to say Clayton, but I'm not sure if that's right or not, but it's a, anyway, a little town up in the mountains, and we liked it a lot but we kind of got the sense that maybe that wasn't a wise move because moving up there and being a band that also had a black member, we kind of got the sense that maybe this was not too good of an idea – to move to this area. This was kind of like...dueling banjos. I mean, it was a beautiful area and all, but, so, anyway, we ended up not doing that. So we stayed in Athens and a couple of guys from the band who were from the triangle area of North Carolina, which is Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill...they were really pushing hard to move back up here. So we moved back up to the Chapel Hill area, and that was in January of '75. And then, about seven or eight months later we decided to disband. Ya know, what happens is...you play music and you are kind of on this one level, and then you kind of get this break and step up to the next level, and then you get another break and you step up to another level. Well, we had stepped up a couple levels and then it kind of just kind of just kind of stayed there. And then once that happened...the fact that we didn't get a national book agency...that would have been the next step up. Anyway, because we kind of stayed where we were, then it kind of became a job more than what it had been before. And then we just had a meeting one day down...we were playing at this little club north of Myrtle Beach and we just started talking about it, the fact that this is not really what we wanted to do, that this is kind of just become a job. And so anyway we decided to break up, there was no...we all just agreed on it. There was no big fights or anything like that. And so we just decided to break up and that was that.

Do you think that Heartwood will play again together?

Hudson: I don't know, I guess it's possible that we could do another one of those reunion parties. It was really hard. We had done one, I think after ten years, and everybody was there but Joe. He wasn't able to come. And then when we did this, I think it was 25 years, everybody was gonna be able to come but Bill Butler because he had a job that day. And at the last minute it turned out that his job was much earlier than he realized so he was able to get there. So all seven of us were there. Now, whether that would ever happen again...it was so hard to organize. I would be real surprised if that happen but it could. And the other thing is we've lost touch with Gary Johnson. I don't really know where he is, if he's still alive. He was really having a really hard time the last time we talked to him, which was at that reunion party. He was living in Cary, North Carolina, and he had been up on a ladder painting his house or something, and fell off the ladder and broke his back. And he didn't have health insurance, so it didn't heal right. So, from then on he was just in terrible pain all the time. And he was just really in sad shape. And then for a year or two after that party I would call him...yeah, I would call him because he didn't do email. I'd call him and we'd talk and once in a while we'd get together and have a meal or whatever. And then several years went by and the last time I tried calling his phone number in Cary it was disconnected. So, nobody knows anything about where he is or whatever. So, I

mean, I guess the rest of us could get together at some point if we could make our schedules work, I mean, I guess it's possible. I don't know.

Well, maybe somebody will read this and know where he is and hook you guys back up again. It's weird the way the Internet works sometimes.

Hudson: Yeah. It's really cool because I've got this Web site up there. I mean there's been, not a bunch of people, but there's been, ya know, quite a few people that have written to me and said, "Ya know, I used to really be a Heartwood fan. Do you have any of the albums on CD or anything like that?" And I could mail 'em out to them and they were really appreciative. And people said, "I was good friends with so-and-so and could you give me his email address?" or whatever. So, I've been able to help a lot of people get reconnected that way and all. So, yeah, the Internet's an amazing thing.

I wanted to tell you one other little thing about *Nothin' Fancy*. We recorded *Nothin' Fancy*. It came out. They did another full page ad and billboard for *Nothin' Fancy*, Heartwood...da da da. Well, in that same issue there was another band that released an album called *Nothin' Fancy*, but it was spelled different, it was *Nuthin' Fancy*. And that band was Lynyrd Skynyrd. And we just thought that was pretty bizarre...here comes a, whatever, *Billboard Magazine* I guess is what it was... and there's two full-page ads in there for albums with the same name. They just happened to...we both just had albums come out at the same time and they advertised it in the same issue.

I know you both are still involved in music. Can you share what you've been up to since Heartwood disbanded?

Hudson: I do two different things. Like, there was a band that I was in for a couple years called Raindance. It was just a straight ahead rock and roll band that I liked a lot. And at some point...right now I don't have any of the Raindance tunes on my Web site, on the [Raindance](#) page, but I'm going to add some.

What I've been doing lately that I really love doing is...Brenda Lynn who was in Warm with me...I started playing again with her once she moved to Chapel Hill about five years ago. And she's much more folky kind of sounding. She's got a great sound and she's one of my all time favorite female singers. And if you go to my site you'll see where it says, "Brenda Lynn," down under the drummers and there's a link to her site where you can here the tunes on her album and see...we toured in Ireland and Raindance toured in Ireland too.

I did listen to her and she does have an amazing voice.

Hudson: Oh, OK. With playing that kind of acoustic kind of stuff...and also there was another band called Mr. Mustard that basically was two acoustic guitars, electric bass, and I played this setup I'm gonna tell you about. And we did mainly Beatles' tunes and stuff. But what this setup consists of is a bass drum and a congo, and a cymbal...and that's it. Actually, my favorite part of music is actually singing harmony. I like that much better than...I mean I love playing drums, but that's what I like the best.

Tim, what was the next move for you?

Hildebrandt: The next move was, actually, I approached the record company and said, "I would like to get my songs back," and I never heard from anybody and got a lawyer and got through all that stuff. And after that, I started playing, just as a single, just writing tunes. And then I joined a band that played up in New York a lot. A little four piece, which was great musicians, a lot of fun, but it was really, it was really hard. I went from, you know, a kind of comfortable lifestyle to a pretty hard lifestyle. I mean hard as far as, you know, New York clubs you start at one in the morning, you know, those kinds of deals. Did that up and down the road in New York for a couple of years. Then started, actually, started working as a recording engineer in the studio, which was a really good studio, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I just got completely immersed in the engineering production...actually I told the guy that owned the studio, "I'll work for you for six months for free if you just show me everything you know." So, I got coffee, and did the helper thing. Learning the engineering business, then got so involved that I started engineering and producing, and then started getting into studios and getting into acoustical stuff. Right now, I have a studio here at my house and I've been the

studio stuff for years. I was playing in bands, obviously getting a job with the state so I could get health insurance, all at the same time.

Yeah.

Hildebrandt: The timing is funny, because I actually have a call coming in this afternoon from a guy from a record company here in North Carolina. I just finished writing a song called, “South of the Border,” which is a like an R&B kind of tinge kind of thing. They have a thing called “beach music” here, which is basically old R&B stuff. So, I kind of pointed towards that. And I just got the e-mails today that all the big wigs are just flipping...you know, they love it.

Cool.

Hildebrandt: They wanna do this, they wanna do that. So, I’m supposed to call in this afternoon and supposed to talk about the options as far as moving that thing along. So it’s kinda turning around because I did it in my studio here at the house. I’ve had another song...I actually have a song from the Disney Channel right now, it’s on *Even Stevens*, which is an after school Disney program. Get some syndication, start making a few pings on that. And the cool thing about it is it’s on Disney, it’s been making money for about five or six years.


Wow.

Hildebrandt: Cause they play it on TV in Denmark...or Brazil. Really weird stuff, free air plays in Egypt or something. It was just incidental music that a friend of mine and I wrote in Nashville cause we were doing all this country stuff. “Let’s just write, a straight up R&B song.” And we did it... one of those like ten minute pieces. Turns out, came back home to North Carolina to take care of my wife’s father because he was sick. I had a bigger studio in North Carolina, and I got a telephone call and this guy says, “Is this Tim Hildebrandt?” “Yeah it’s Tim Hildebrandt.” “This is so-and-so from Disney Productions and we have a song that you wrote and we wanted to know if you, as far as publishing, let us use it for BMI,” and so forth and so on. And I thought it was my friend Tony, the guy I wrote it with, and I said, “Tony get off my back. I got stuff to do. Quit messing with me.” And he says, “No this is so-and-so.” I said, “Yeah, right.” He said, “You got a fax machine?” I said, “Of course I got a fax machine.” He said, “I’ll fax you the contract.” So, here comes this contract. I said, “Whoa.” I go to Nashville to write this R&B song, come back to North Carolina to get it cut. That’s pretty weird. That’s the nature of the business, I guess.

What’s your home studio like?

Hildebrandt: I’m using 24 tracks right now. I’m getting ready to put in Pro Tool systems, actually, on the first of January. We are putting in the pro tools because I did a lot of digital editing and, of course, Pro Tools is, if you know anything about it, it’s the pretty much the de facto standard...90 percent of the records are done with it. Which makes it easy because actually you are dealing with files and non-linear editing and all that stuff so you can shoot stuff back and forth to the studios. Without having to physically be there. And so, that’s what this next phone call is about, as far as taking these tracks and dumping them into pro tools and putting some other sections in, beefing it up. I love it, we actually renovated an old house and actually had the studio built on it so I can actually walk from the kitchen through a couple rooms into the studio...don’t even have to leave home!

And they are finally making me a Web site. Actually, Robert said, “Don’t you think it’s time for you to have a website.” I don’t know. So, actually they are doing that now because they are going to be able to obviously push that other tune on that too.

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Interview with guitarist Yngwie Malmsteen

December 8, 2008

Sweden's Yngwie Malmsteen is one of rock's most influential and original guitarists. When most guitarists were woodshedding to copy Eddie Van Halen's tapping technique in the late '70s and early '80s, Malmsteen looked much farther back for his inspiration, to the unlikely world of classical music and composers such as Antonio Vivaldi, J.S. Bach and Wolfgang Mozart. As well, the Italian virtuoso violinist Nicolò Paganini proved to be a major influence on Malmsteen's playing and approach to his instrument. Studying such maestros, Malmsteen gained a rich harmonic palette and dazzling technique that translated amazingly well into the world of hard rock. Along the way, Malmsteen basically created the "classical metal" genre, one that's still going strong today.

I spoke with Malmsteen recently about music, recording, his latest album, *Perpetual Flame*, and his Custom Tribute Fender Stratocaster.



Is it true that you first arrived in the States with only your guitar and an extra pair of pants?

[laughs] Yeah. See what happened was, I was a musician in Sweden - I started [playing when I was 5 years old - I was in bands when I was like 9 or 10. I was really, really serious, you know? By the time I was 16 or 17, I was a professional - making almost nothing, but that was what I did. When I sent the tape in to *Guitar Player* - I just did because they said you could do it. I didn't expect anything. All of the sudden, the phone was ringing off the hook. At the time they called me, they said, "You've got to come over to America." I said, "America? What's that?" Because that didn't happen to a kid from Sweden. That wasn't the thing to do. Later on, a lot of people did that, but at that time nobody did. At the time, I had a girlfriend and a cat and a band - everything. So, I didn't know what was going to happen. But that's actually a true story, yeah, and that's actually the guitar that's on the *Rising Force* album.

The classical connection has always been a big part of your music. Steve Hackett has said, "The ability to be able to detach from life is something that classical music offers that rock can't express." Do you agree with that?

This is a really deep subject, so I'm going to elaborate if you don't mind. People have a very big misconception about Mozart and Bach, Beethoven and Vivaldi, and these guys. What they see now is guys in

boxes playing scores. And obviously there are some superb orchestras. But you've got to remember that when those composers were alive, the way things were played then and composed and performed was completely different. That was today's music. It wasn't "classical" music then. That was that moment in time - it's become classical now. Those guys improvised - those guys were musicians and composers and improvisers. The reason I say improvisers is because that's a very important thing. I know a lot of people in the classical world, who play classical music today, and they cannot play an improvisation. But that's how the great guys did it. Improvisation is the genesis of composition. If you don't improvise, you can't compose. If you tell most people who play in a symphony orchestra to compose something, they'll look at you like you're crazy. They'll say, "I can't compose." They're trained to play what's on the paper. My sister is a classically trained musician, and you can put anything in front of her to play and she can play it - play it upside down. "Can you play this in C-sharp instead of B-minor?" She can play it no problem. But if I say, "Hey, can you improvise on this chord progression?" She probably could, but she wouldn't want to, you know. She wouldn't feel comfortable. I've done a lot of classical stuff because I've composed for symphony orchestras. I've done a lot of things where I've played with symphonies in Europe and Japan and China. They have one thing in common: They follow the conductor like little sheep. That's perfect, because that's what you're supposed to do. It's very, very interesting to play with those guys because they're so good at that, you know? But that's not the way classical music was done back in the day. Of course the ensembles had to play the written piece, but let's say a piano concerto by Beethoven - before Beethoven went deaf, he used to perform. He would go into a cadenza for 20 minutes! He wouldn't stop. He would improvise for 20 minutes, and then when he was done, the orchestra came in. These guys were different than most people think they were. And trust me, they're my ultimate heroes.

You've got a guitar concerto under your belt now. Have you thought about writing something specifically for strings and guitar, maybe a duet or quartet piece?

Sure, sure I have. And I kind of do, because every time I compose - whether it's for a rock band or a symphony - I do it the same way. Obviously, the orchestration is much more complex with a whole symphony. I've done things where I've re-arranged things - I do a duet for strings with my keyboard player, where I do like a Bach thing. And that's sort of, to me, like what you're talking about. Yeah, I do those things. To be honest with you, I'm in a place right now in my life where I really like to *rock*, man. [laughs]

Where does your musical inspiration come from these days?

It isn't anything direct. It is so natural, and I swear to God that it doesn't matter when or where - as soon as I pick the guitar up, it happens. It is composition automatic. It doesn't stop. It's like turning a faucet on. It's ridiculous. And I don't know exactly how to explain that. Sometimes I'll come up with something, and it's gone as quickly as it was there. If I don't have tape running, it's gone forever. That's how it works for me. I don't know how it happens, but it does.

I also write all the lyrics. And lyrics are completely different. There I draw a very strong influence from books, film, real events and feelings. My car [laughs] - whatever. So that inspiration can come from a lot of different things. But I don't want to try to explain the music, because that's like a magic show.



***Perpetual Flame* was made in sort of an old school way, refining the songs recording in between touring. What did you like about that approach?**

It wasn't by design, it's just the way things happened. It did result in something I thought was really interesting, which is being the songwriter, the arranger, the producer - everything that I do - to come back at intervals was actually really good. To come away from it and then go back to it, I'd think, "Wow!" And you'd see it and hear it completely different, almost like an outsider. That was very good for me, because I think the album became more diverse, also more focused. Every time I came in, something appeared to me in a different way.

That's an interesting approach, to hear your music like an outsider.

Of course, it's not exactly like an outsider, but it's much more so. Because first I write. Then I demo and cut the drums. Then I add the bass and guitars and keyboards. Then I write the lyrics, and then the singer comes in, then I start mixing and mastering. It's all done in one go. You can get too close, you know.

You often call yourself a purist with regards to guitars, amps, cars and watches. What's your feeling about analog versus digital recording?

I think, through a lot of trial and error, I realized a few things. First of all, digital recording falls and stands on one thing, which is the converters - the amount of bits and hertz that you have. At 96 kHz, 24 bits, you have very good resolution, but it seems that if you have an Apogee - if you have different converters - which it converts analog to digital and digital to analog, because ultimately what you hear is analog in the end. You have to pre-convert it... did you ever see a movie called *The Fly*? With Jeff Goldblum?

Yeah.

OK. It's like that. You're taking something, turning it into nothing and then making it into something again. That's exactly what digital does. Whereas analog, it's like an imprint; it's a photograph with the sound - sound photograph on magnetic tape. Ultimately, this technology started out - I remember the first digital things, and they really sucked. It sounded like shit. It was very popular in the late '80s for some producers to use these machines. I remember the first album I started using digital [technology] was *Odyssey* - that was 20 years ago. I didn't think much about it at the time because we locked up two machines, one analog and one digital. We had two machines locked together. Then we did another album called *Eclipse*, which was done with digital all together - digital tape. Then after that, I was home in my own studio - I had the big reel-to-reel Studer 2-inch machines, and that's what I stayed with for a long time. Then a friend of mine, Jeff Glixman - he's a producer. He got me into the Otari Radar machine, which is a hard disc recorder, and I used to take the Otari and lock it up with a Studer 2-inch. I'd put them together and have the best of both worlds. It was a very good thing for a long time. When I record now, I record real, "live" drums. I don't sample them. I don't quantize them. I won't sequence them. They're real, live drums played by a real, live drummer.

What a concept.

[laughs] I like that. Yeah. Another thing: When I'm recording guitars, I have live Marshall stacks - on full! As loud as they go. And we put them in a room that's just big enough for the walls not to be knocked out.

[laughs] Yeah. I call it the "Room of Doom." It's an actual room with speakers, and I mike it up with some very nice AKG-442s, and I put them through a tube compressor and an equalizer-preamp, and then onto a digital hard disc recorder. And that comes out sounding like a monster, you know? Awesome.

**What are the plans for your new record label, Rising Force, beyond your new album?**

Well, it's only been about a month or so. The new album, *Perpetual Flame*, is definitely the focal point, but there's gonna be a lot more of my older stuff coming out. There's gonna be some new live stuff coming out from this tour. And we're gonna have other type of releases - books and all sorts of things. Maybe in the future, if we hear somebody really good we'll sign them up. This is really just the beginning.

"Eleventh Hour" is one of my favorites on the new record. You recorded those strings in Istanbul?

Those guys are string guys, but I just showed them their parts - I had a guitar there - and I just said, "Here. Play, 'dah, dah, dah, dah.'" And they had one cellist and like six violins and violas - and we double-tracked them a couple times - and it's just so refreshing. No notes or paper. It was awesome.

You've said that the instrumental "Caprici Di Diablo" is the hardest thing you've ever played in your life. Apart from the speed of it, what makes it so challenging?

That's a very good question. What makes it really challenging is the fact - you have A-major, a-minor, D-major, G-major. [hums chord progression] You have a chord progression that goes more than once. I left it very bare. It's basically just a lead guitar and bass, so there's nowhere to hide. I wanted it to be very daring, but I wanted it to be structured. I wanted to capture the moment. That was the last thing I did on the record - I kept saying, "Let's do something else. Let's do something else," until there's nothing left to do, and I had no choice. [laughs] I could go in and play it like a robot - I could play the chords, no problem. I mean, it's physical, but I could do it. But I didn't want that: I wanted to capture the moment - I did it pretty much in one take. I don't like to go back and do it over and over and over, because it never gets any better.

"Live To Fight" has almost a medieval feel at the beginning and a cool groove, and the whole album has sort of an ancient vibe to it. Were you going for that?

You know, I didn't really go for anything. It was just whatever new material came out, but coming back to it every time from a tour or something like that, I came back and it sounded really different. When it came to songs like "Live To Fight," that's when I decided it wasn't going to work with the old singer. The songs were more or less totally finished when Tim ["Ripper" Owens] came in. I don't think I had a specific idea, but it was just a natural evolution of things.

If you view the voice as an instrument, how would you describe Tim Owens?

Well, I think that he's got the power and the range and the vibrato that I like - he's got all those elements that I really dig, you know? And he sings all the material almost like perfect. It's a very good match.

You changed singers in the middle of this project. It seems like you've had to defend yourself a lot for taking charge of your musical projects. Who knows better what you want than you?

It's a toughie. What it is, is that I want to have the best guys to form the parts I like. I would probably have to say, even though it sounds a little pretentious, is that I work very much like a classical composer. You know in a Vivaldi concerto, the cellist doesn't say, "Excuse me. Can I play an f-sharp here instead?" Because that's the way it is, you know? It's a funny thing.

Congratulations on your signature Stratocaster. Fender did an amazing job. The detail is stunning, right down to the bite marks.

Yeah. Well, imagine how I feel. They sent me one, and when someone opened the case - because I lent them the real one to copy - and I thought they had sent that one back. I swear to God, man. I've had that guitar for 30 years. It [the reproduction] smells the same. It's sick. I said to [Fender master builder] John Cruz, "How did you guys do this? Is it some sort of alchemy? Is there witchcraft going on there?"

That's quite an honor.

Oh my God. Yeah!

One of the great things about music is the passing of the torch. I'm sure a lot of today's players were as inspired to pick up the guitar after hearing "Black Star" as you were from hearing Deep Purple's "Fireball" or "Demon's Eye." That's a cool circle to be in.

Yeah, absolutely. Not too long ago I went to see Black Sabbath in Miami - they're called Heaven And Hell now. And I gotta tell you, man, these guys lifted the roof off the place. It was so fucking good. And you know who was opening?

Who?

Alice Cooper. He's a good friend of mine, as well. Alice was amazing. These guys could be my dad, man. So there's no reason to say, "OK, I'm done now," after those shows. It was very cool, because those guys rock harder... I remember a lot of festivals here in the summer - I get to see a lot of bands. Sabbath and Alice Cooper were really rocking. So I hope I can keep it up like that, also. That's what I want to do, anyway. [laughs]

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[Nick D'Virgilio's tribute to Genesis' The Lamb](#)

Lies Down On Broadway

December 4, 2008



In the world of progressive rock, few albums have enjoyed the critical and fan acclaim of Genesis' *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*. The 1974 release was in many ways the culmination of the musical explorations of Peter Gabriel, Tony Banks, Mike Rutherford, Steve Hackett and Phil Collins - the five had previously recorded the superb triumvirate of *Nursery Cryme*, *Foxtrot* and *Selling England By The Pound*. Whereas those records contained music almost Victorian-like in its expansiveness and theatrics - including the epic "Supper's Ready" - *The Lamb* featured tighter, street-tough progressive rock songs fueled by Gabriel's remarkable lyrics, detailing the story of Rael, a Puerto Rican kid who wanders through New York City, experiencing its many guises.

And the music reflects that. It could be grinding ("The Grand Parade Of Lifeless Packaging"), scary ("In The Cage"), celebratory ("Counting Out Time") and soothing ("The Carpet Crawlers"). The tunes were heightened by remarkable band performances, such as Hackett's flowing guitar lines on "Hairless Heart" or Rutherford's classic bass line on the title track. The 23 songs on *Lamb* became this Genesis' lineup's swan song and their crowning achievement. Though the band would go on to unimaginable commercial success, few Genesis fans would argue that the band ever recaptured the magic heard on their early recordings.

Since its release, *The Lamb* has become something of legend, always finding its place on any Top 20 list of all-time greatest progressive rock albums. So one could feel a bit of skepticism toward a tribute or any remaking of this seminal album. Why mess with a good thing?

A friendly conversation between Nick D'Virgilio (drummer/vocalist of Spock's Beard) and producer Mark Hornsby led to the two recording *The Lamb* in its entirety, titling the project *Rewiring Genesis: A Tribute To The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway*. As D'Virgilio writes in the liners, "We had been hanging out at the NAMM Show here in LA...and after a few beers and about 10 hours of being at the convention, Mark turns to me and says, 'Why don't you come out to Nashville, and let's record "Slippermen" country-fied or bluegrass-style or something?'"

The two hooked up in Nashville, and with the help of some musicians - many who had never heard *The Lamb* before - they cranked out the record in a few short weeks. Through the D'Virgilio/Hornsby filter, the songs get a fresh coat of paint and life, whether it's the Bourbon Street glee of "Counting Out Time" or turning the instrumentation on its head on "In The Cage" and others, the result is a victorious interpretation of an old

fave. With a clean, bright sound; excellent singing from D'Virgilio (you can understand all the lyrics!), and some spry performances from the backing musicians (guitarist Don Carr is a hero), the songs come to life, emerging from their snug cuckoo cocoon (sorry) to fly free again. In many ways, it sounds like the direction Gabriel and crew might have taken *The Lamb* into the 21st Century.

D'Virgilio offered his thoughts on remaking this classic album.

1. What were the musical challenges of learning and recording *The Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* in its entirety?

It is a beast of a piece of art. There are many different feels, time signatures and sounds. I think John Hinchey probably had the biggest challenge - having to do something with all of the synth parts. That are many of them all throughout the record and John just completely nailed it. He adapted strings and horns in such unique ways that it made the songs sound fresh. The other challenges were having a bunch of people who were not very familiar with it learn it and play it, all the vocals, and the mixing. Oh man, there is a lot of music there. The fact we got this thing done in about seven weeks is amazing.

2. Was there anything that surprised you about the music or lyrics?

Something that surprised me is how the music is very soulful once you strip it down to the basic parts. The prog aspect is still there for sure but the parts are very groovy, some parts very bluesy. That is why I always love early Genesis. They made prog groove.

3. How far from the original versions were you willing to stray to give these songs a fresh spin?

There was no plan. We just started recording and wherever we went is where it went. That is how great things like the middle of "Counting Out Time" happened. We were recording the song and all was going along beautifully, Then Dave suggested that the mid section was ripe for a Dixieland band. There was unanimous vote of "Yeah, let's go for it!" And...we did. That is the kind of thing that made these recording sessions so much fun. The guys came up with things on the spot and we tried them - simple as that. All the guys are such good musicians that it was very natural to trust their ideas.

4. Did you expect that having musicians who were unfamiliar with the album prior to recording could work so well?

I had no idea what to expect with this whole thing. It was after we recorded the first song - we tried "The Colony of Slippermen" - that I knew it could work.

5. The strings and horns on "In The Cage" work perfectly. They give the tune an almost symphonic feel in places. What was your feeling the first time you heard these arrangements?

I loved it. Like I said earlier, John did such a great job arranging the parts. The rest of the song is pretty close to the original. It is the strings and horns that make it.

6. The guitar tone on "Hairless Heart" is very close to Steve Hackett's. Was Hackett's sound something you and Don Carr wanted to be faithful to?

You would have to ask Don and Mark about that but I was there when they recorded those parts. From what I remember there was a suggestion to play a more jazzy sounding guitar and to have the track sound like we were at some smoky jazz club just groovin away. We were not going to have strings on there originally but then while doing the vocals I added a back round vocal pad and then when Mark was recoding strings for another song he decided to add them to this song and then all the starts were aligned. It turned out beautifully. It is one of the highlights of the CD for me.

7. “Counting Out Time” has a fantastic Vaudeville-meets-New Orleans feel, and “The Colony of Slippermen” brings in accordion, clarinet and sitar - parts are almost like 21st Century Benny Goodman. And “Riding The Scree” is another incredible arrangement. Your overall interpretation brings this album to life, for me, like a musical.

Thank you. We were not thinking of a musical at the time, but now listening back I see what you mean. I could totally see this on stage. Hopefully one day we can make that happen.

8. One of my complaints about the original record is the sound - it’s sort of muddy. I like the recording approach here. The cleaner sound makes it easier to hear and understand the lyrics. Was that intentional? Your vocals, as well, are really great.

I have heard that, too. But the original had so many great moments. Even with the muddy thing it was and is a classic to so many Genesis fans. I knew before we even started that it was going to SOUND great. Mark is a very talented engineer and Dave’s studio has so much great gear that was going to sound great.

9. Have you received comments from any of the Genesis members about this tribute?

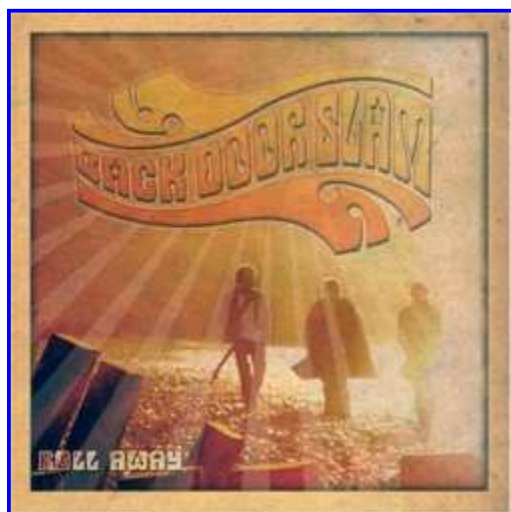
Not yet but we’ll see what happens in the future. It sure would be great if they go on board with this version.

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[Back Door Slam - Interview](#)

November 25, 2008



Hailing from the tiny Isle of Man, Back Door Slam are a three-piece outfit making big waves on this side of the Atlantic. Taking musical cues from past greats such as John Mayall, Eric Clapton, Albert King and Rory Gallagher, and in turn the masters who inspired them, Back Door Slam put their powerful spin on the blues and infuse it with a healthy dose of rock and youthful energy.

Although guitarist/vocalist Davy Knowles, bassist Adam Jones and drummer Ross Doyle are each just 21 years old, they play like they’ve been joined at the hip for decades. Knowles’ songwriting is already noteworthy, and his voice has a weary earthiness that belies his youth. And his guitar playing is phenomenal. Jones and Doyle are polished players, as well, and provide the perfect rhythmic backdrop for a band poised to

be the torchbearer of the blues for years to come.

I caught Back Door Slam at a recent show at Minneapolis' Pantages Theater - the second of a two-night weekend venue as opening act for Gov't Mule. While Gov't Mule performed their sound check, I sat down with Knowles backstage to talk about the blues, the band and more. A while later, his bandmates Jones and Doyle joined us.

I think it's a perfect match for you guys to be touring with Gov't Mule. They have such an encyclopedic knowledge of music. What's it like to watch them every night?

Knowles: We're learning so much just being around these guys. As a guitar player, watching Warren Haynes every night - I'm like taking notes. [laughs] He's incredible.

One of things that impressed me about Back Door Slam's music is the riffs. The songs are built on more than just a 12-bar boogie. Your riffs have some steps and progressions that are missing in a lot of blues music.

Knowles: Thank you. I think there are a lot of people who can do that 12-bar thing and pull it off a lot better than we can. It's already been done and done really well. We just kind of stumbled into that.

You and Ross have been playing together for several years now, and Adam's the newer guy. How would you describe the musical chemistry between the three of you?

Knowles: It's just a really good, intuition type of thing. Sometimes what the other players are doing will push you into something that you don't normally do. Having that kind of movement is something really quite special. It's also wonderful to be up onstage with your two best friends every night.

Do you ever play musical tricks on each other?

Knowles: Probably without knowing. [laughs]

"Raw" and "rhythmic" are two words that describe blues music very well. How would you like your music to be described?

Knowles: Energetic. Sincere. Not strictly blues, I guess. I mean I love the blues, and that's where everything comes from, but I think to try and create a distinctive sound is the ultimate goal.

One criticism about blues music - or just a generalization by those who don't like it - is that it all sounds the same. Can you relate to that?

Knowles: I can see it, but in all honesty I think that's kind of a shallow way of thinking. It's such a vast genre. Listen to Robert Johnson or Johnny Lang - they're still pigeonholed as blues, but it's two completely different types of music. It's a vast genre. The whole 12-bar thing is wonderful. I mean Status Quo made a living out of the 12-bar thing, but no one calls them blues, they're a rock and roll band.

The title track on *Roll Away* is a blues song that a lot of young people can relate to - the idea of leaving someplace small or isolated to see what's out there in the world. Was that a band idea or more coming from you?

Knowles: I think it was more from me. I have an older sister, and ever since she moved away to go to University - that always seemed like almost a romantic thing, getting off the Isle of Man. I was really proud of my sister. She moved away to the English mainland, then she moved away to Malta - she just completely distanced herself from it. She still loves it - we're proud to be Manx - but she really just moved away. I was amazed at that, and ever since she did that, I wanted to do that.

Does your approach to the acoustic guitar differ from the electric?

Knowles: I'm always more nervous on acoustic because everyone can hear it if you mess up. [laughs] But I think the electric is such a versatile instrument - you can have some really atmospheric, beautiful sounds, sort of Mark Knopfler-esque and people like that. Or you can have an all-out rock approach, like Angus Young. Whereas acoustic can be a very delicate instrument, and that's wonderful. I really love the playing of Bert Jansch and Davy Graham.

Graham is amazing.

Knowles: Yeah. I could never do anything like that.

On the same hand, you won't see Graham get on stage with a Stratocaster and do a 15-minute solo.

Knowles: That's so true.

Both types of playing are equally difficult to do well.

Knowles: They're almost like two different instruments.

On your EP, you guys do a really cool cover of The Doors' "Been Down So Long" and an electrifying version of Hendrix's "Red House." And live you've been covering David Crosby's "Almost Cut My Hair." What's your approach to cover songs?

Knowles: I think you always have to be careful when you're using someone else's songs. You just find a song you really enjoy - you enjoy the lyrics or the meaning of it - and one that you think you can put your own stamp on. You don't want to cover it really religiously, because the guy who wrote that has done that. You gotta try and put your own stamp on it without wrecking it.

I love the way you put a charge into "Been Down So Long."

Knowles: The reason we chose that song was because when I was about 13, I was in this band with some 40- and 50-year olds - and I was the kid guitar player who came in and had fun and jammed. And we used to do that song, so I thought it would be a really nice thing to go back and revisit it. I would not be in the U.S. without those guys over there. I learned so much. It was a great education.

How was your experience in the studio, recording your first full-length album?

Knowles: It was strange. I mean, we've been a live band for so long that it felt very strange to go into the studio. It's so different to try and get the sound you like. I know Rory Gallagher - a hero of mine - always talked about how much trouble he had doing that. I can absolutely see why now. [laughs] With more experience, hopefully it will become easier and we'll find some tricks to help.

I know Gov't Mule records all their shows. Is your music being recorded, too?

Knowles: We are recording it. A lot of what we're doing is new stuff, and we want to kind of archive it.

I want to throw out a few names and get your thoughts. Let's start with Albert King?

Knowles: Albert King - the guy had the most stinging guitar style but the smoothest voice. He was absolutely terrifying.

Blind Willie Johnson?

Knowles: Blind Willie Johnson's actually my favorite Delta blues guy of all time. He was so haunting. Robert Johnson had a cleanliness [to his music], but for just raw, gospel-type blues. He was chilling, like he was possessed. It was like he was delivering a sermon - "John The Revelator, "Dark Was The Night, Cold Was The Ground" - all that stuff was incredible.

Duane Allman?

Knowles: Duane Allman, I really love because of his pioneering work with slide guitar. I really just love his style. Unbelievable. The influence he left is really astounding.

Rory Gallagher?

Knowles: I first heard Rory Gallagher because there was a magazine - *Guitarist* - and they had a rundown of the Top 100 blues guitar players. And he came in at the Top 10, or something like that, and I thought, "This is one of the only guys I don't know," and I wanted to find out who he was. So I bought the *Irish Tour* video, and it just blew my mind. I loved it because I completely related to it, because where I grew up I was so close to Ireland - a really Celtic place. And I heard his music and it blew me away. I had heard rock-blues and thought it was blues, and yet I hadn't heard Celtic blues before. I never thought you could mix those two together until I heard Rory. And that really opened a lot of doors for me.

I don't think his live performances have ever been matched.

Knowles: It's unbelievable. The guy gives out so much energy. I wished I had seen him live. I really do.

Do you experiment much with open tunings or try to play traditional British Isles music?

Knowles: Rory used DADGAD tuning a lot, and I've been using that on one of the songs on *Roll Away* - "Too Good For Me" is in DADGAD. And there's another song that's been written recently that's in that tuning, also. What I really loved about him was his acoustic playing, his flatpicking. I actually bought a National guitar - the same model he played. And I actually think he's the reason I picked up mandolin, too.

Adam, who has influenced you as a bassist?

Jones: I'm a big Pino Palladino fan. He's my favorite bassist. I also like Donald "Duck" Dunn, Willie Weeks. Jaco Pastorius, obviously. He's the master.

Can you take a player like Jaco and incorporate his playing or style into Back Door Slam's music? Maybe just his creativity and approach?

Jones: Yeah, his creativity. He had a great harmonic sense, so stuff like that. But in this type of music we play, it's not that practical to use - a lot of what he does. Though I try. [laughs] I try and make it fit. [laughs]

Ross, I picked up a definite John Bonham influence in your playing. His playing worked very well in a blues-rock context, and it seems like that less-is-more style can really make a statement with the type of music you play.

Doyle: He was one of the best I heard. He could do all the crazy stuff when he wanted to, but he could also play a simple beat and you knew it was him.

Davy, I know you discovered blues through your dad's record collection. If you were going to teach a course in the blues at a school, how would do it?

Knowles: Wow. You know what, I think the most important thing to know about the blues is that it's a folk music. It's important to know the history behind it - why it came about and how it came about: the slave trade

and the horrible things that went on. It's important to realize where the basis of the music comes from. So I think that's where I'd start. You can learn the technical things later - the 12-bar system.

How about you, Adam?

Jones: [laughs] I'd probably invite Davy. He's got much more of a blues knowledge than I have. Practical uses are probably best - bringing in instruments and tell the history of the blues.

Your thoughts, Ross?

Doyle: I'm not really as proficient in the blues as Davy. When I joined the band I was more into pop, like Oasis and that. So if I was going to teach a class in blues I would probably bring in Davy, or someone like that, to speak about it.

What have you learned about the blues playing in this band?

Doyle: It's such a great style of music. It's so open, and there's so many styles of blues. I hadn't really listened to it, and he [Davy] turned me on to so many different people. There's so many things you can find in it.

Back to the classroom. Would there be any records you'd make required listening?

Knowles: Yeah. The first one for me, which I think got so many people into the blues, would be *John Mayall & The Bluesbreakers With Eric Clapton*. Again the important thing is the history behind it. That album wouldn't have been around if it weren't for Freddie King or Albert King or Otis Rush - people like that. So I'd start there and work backwards.

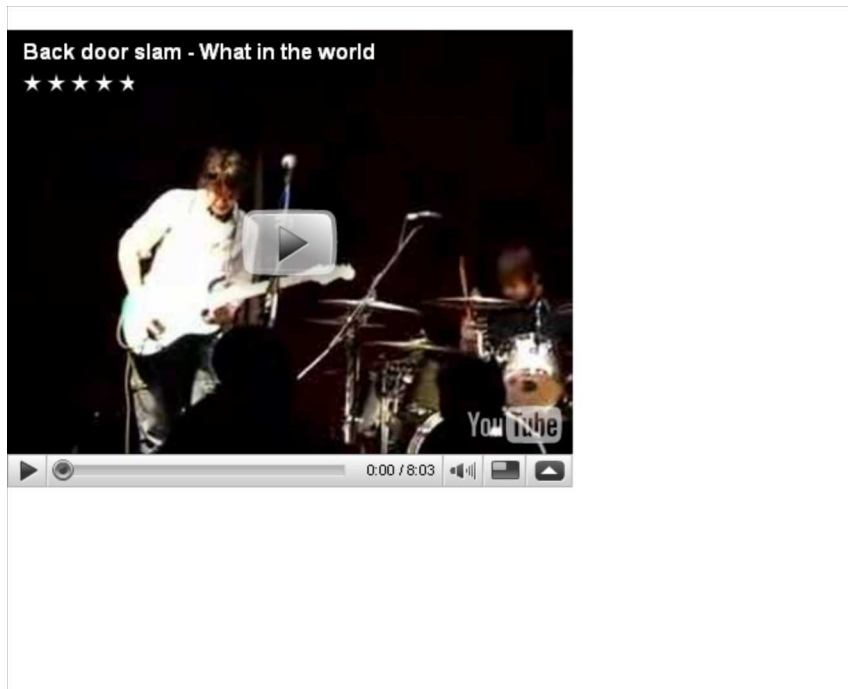
Jones: I'm a big John Mayer fan. I like his blues playing.

What appealed to you about Mayall's album?

Knowles: The aggression of the guitar playing that Eric Clapton had on it. Mayall's voice is unique - that was really cool. But it was the aggression and how loud it was. It's just a really raucous album.

Concert Notes: Back Door Slam played a tight, 30-minute set with material taken from their 2007 debut, *Roll Away*, along with some as-yet-to-be-released songs to a very appreciative crowd - most of whom were old enough to be parents or grandparents to these three. Two album highlights were the infectious "Come Home" and a riveting cover of Blind Joe Reynolds' "Outside Woman Blues." They closed the set with a stunning take on Willie Dixon's "What In The World." As Knowles' fingers flew across the fretboard, Jones and Doyle hammered home an impossibly huge-sounding rhythm. It was one of the most powerful musical moments I've witnessed.

The video posted below features the band playing the aforementioned Dixon tune at another venue. Imagine hearing this live, with a bank of speakers throwing the sound right at you! It was phenomenal.



As well, my friend Arnie Goodman at [Blue Storm Music](#) forwarded some excellent [shots](#) of the band in concert at the Chevrolet Theater in Wallingford, Conn.

Enough said, you must see and hear these guys live.

Special thanks to Sharon Weisz of [W3 Public Relations](#), Back Door Slam road manager Todd Bradley and Goodman for their help with this interview.

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[Stu Nunnery - 35 Years On: The Interview](#)

November 3, 2008



If you've never heard of Stu Nunnery, you're probably not alone, but it would be your loss. Nunnery is a

singer/songwriter who released one self-titled album on the short-lived Evolution label in 1973. The nine-song LP showcased a heady talent, playing a mix of folk-rock that fans of Dan Fogelberg, James Taylor, Gordon Lightfoot and Jackson Browne should connect with immediately. Yet, Nunnery sounded like no one else. And if you've never heard him, read and listen on, for there's plenty of great music to discover here.

I first learned of Nunnery when I found his album amid tens of thousands of old, dusty LPs in a St. Paul, MN, building, whose lower floor was serving as a used record store. That same day, I discovered another singer/songwriter (Jimmie Spheeris) who comes up in this interview, as well. I plunked down \$1 for Nunnery's album and left not expecting much. I got home, dropped the needle on Side 1 and after about 20 seconds of hearing the lead cut, "[Isle Of Debris](#)," I was thinking, "How has this been hidden for so long?" Later, I found out this was his *only* record and one could only hear it on vinyl. How could this album languish in obscurity and *never* find its way to compact disc? Why didn't he release more albums? As I was to find out, truth is crazily stranger than fiction. Nunnery's story is one you just have to read for yourself.

You released one album in 1973 and then seemed to disappear. What happened?

First off, I always appreciate hearing from someone who had picked up my first and *only* album. It's funny, at this point in life I'm getting a lot more calls [about my music] than I got many many years ago.

My story is a simple one. I did one album in 1973-74. Over the next couple of years, two of the cuts from that album - "[Madelaine](#)" and "[Sally From Syracuse](#)" - reached the Top 100 on the American charts. And in 1976 - after I had left the company I was with - "[Lady It's Time To Go](#)," which is on the flip side of the album, became the #1 Record in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil. And it was my recording of it, sold to a label called Copacabana Records, which was part of the RCA stable. And in 1976, I got a phone call after I had left the record company I was with, telling me I was a big star in South America, and, "Can you come down here and perform?"

Well, I could barely *eat* back in 1976 - I was still [playing] in small clubs. And I never saw a dime for that #1 Record down there in South America. In fact for all of 1976, my English-speaking record was the 57th-best-selling record down there, which is really bizarre.

You didn't receive any royalties?

I also never received anything from the album that I did do, which sold fairly well. I had a lot of turntable hits around the world: I had a turntable hit in South Africa, Australia, England and Canada. In addition to the two records on the Top 100 American charts, "[Lady It's Time To Go](#)," was recorded by B.J. Thomas, and Nicky Hopkins, if you can believe that - the former keyboard player for the Rolling Stones. So there was a lot of attention; I did some concerts. The label I was with - it was Evolution Records: part of the Longines-Wittnauer watch company's series of companies. They went out of business in '74/'75, I guess.

After that, I went back to the Berkshires, where I lived. I was living in the Berkshires in western Massachusetts when my first album came out. After that and the first album came out, I went back to the Berkshires and continued playing in clubs. And I received a call from a woman, who was in the fashion industry but very interested in the music industry. She found me through somebody, and for a time became my manager. She represented me to John Hammond, at Columbia Records, and I was signed to Epic Records in 1976. I went into the studio in New York and cut four records, four sides. I was then sent to California to redo one side and to cut a few more sides. I was told, at the time, that one of the records, which I had done, was going to be the theme at the CBS Convention that year. Soon after I got a call [saying] that Epic Records was going to move into disco, and I was asked if I would consider being a disco artist. [laughs] I was 26 at the time and quite full of myself - I thought I knew what I was doing - and I said, "Absolutely not."

And then the thought was, back then, that they were going to put some supergroup together. And some names of people you know from other groups that were not functioning at the time - they were going to put us

together. I was going to be the lead singer and the writer, and they thought that was a great idea. Well, that kind of fell apart as well, and Epic really became more of an R&B and disco label. And I left CBS Records in early 1977, without having anything released. I had recorded, I think, five or six sides - at least half an album - and nothing was released. Walking out the door of CBS, though - I was living in New York at the time; this was '77, I had moved down to New York. Friends of mine ran jingle houses in New York City, and they were kind of the feeder companies for advertising firms that wrote radio and television jingles. A woman that I knew, who liked my music, asked me if I would consider coming in and writing jingles. And given that I didn't have a recording contract at the time, I said, "Sure. Why not?"

How did jingle writing go?

Well, it turned out to be a very lucrative profession, and the first four or five things that I wrote became national campaigns. I sang solo on a number of campaigns, for GMC Trucks, cars, sodas - all kinds of things - and made very nice money for about two or three years. I was actually starting to study acting and dance in New York, and I figured I was going to be a triple threat on Broadway - in addition to being a recording artist - because I continued to seek a recording contract with other companies in New York. Then in April of 1978 is when everything... the day the music died. I stood up off a bed after a nap - after a recording session - and an explosion happened in the left side of my head. It was not a stroke. Thirty years later, it appears to have been probably a rupture or breakage of a blood vessel. And it immediately filled up my ear chamber, and I was 40 percent deaf in 24 hours on the left side. While there was no diagnosis in the polytomography - they take an X-ray of your ear - it did not show a tumor. Nonetheless, I was 40 percent gone in 24 hours. I had terrible vertigo and dizziness for a long time.

I continued to record in New York City, doing jingles and things, but I was beginning to miss-pitch, because my tonal discrimination had been distorted in the left ear. When you're in the studio and recording, of course, you're wearing a headset. And in one ear you're trying to hear yourself, and in the other you're trying to hear the band. Well, now I only had one ear to work with. It became obvious to me that things were not going as well, but I still continued to pursue music. And in 1981, while painting my apartment, I had the exact same explosion in my right ear. By then, it was gone. I had almost no hearing at all. I had terrible vertigo and tinnitus in both ears - it was over. And I was 31.

What I did immediately - after seeing all the doctors I could see... I went out to the House Ear Institute in California, and I had a well-known ENT [ear, nose and throat specialist] here in New York. They were trying all kinds of things; they were putting me on steroids, thinking it was some kind of auto-immune thing. They weren't sure what had happened, but it was very rare that it would be bilateral like that.

Three years later, I started losing my sight. Both retinas detached while I was driving home from a business trip. In 1983, with no music career, I decided to try and take care of my health - I became food crazy, basically, foods and health. And my hearing was improving enough in '83-'84, that I thought, "Maybe I could do this [music] again." The interesting part of the story is that I took some of the money that I had made doing jingles, which was considerable, and I hired a producer friend of mine and went into the studio to cut four more tracks, probably late '82/early '83. They were excellent tracks but never got released because my hearing was essentially gone soon after that. But if you can imagine, my band was Paul Shaffer on piano; Lawrence Juber, from Wings, was my guitar player; Allan Schwartzberg was the drummer; Jimmy Malin, who passed away several years ago, was percussion; and Will Lee was on bass. These were friends of my producer, Bert Dovo. We were able to put together this very hot band to do a couple of tracks, and the four tracks were done but the songs were never released. So, I still have that music, and, in fact, I still have a lot of old music on tape of some things I'm thinking of doing.

In late 1984, I went to work for a natural food company and worked on the road for seven years. I was a sales manager for a natural food company in the Midwest, but I worked from Maine to Washington D.C., and literally was on the road three weeks out of four. In addition to selling food, I was also telling my story.

How would you compare the music you did with that band to your first record?

The biggest frustration for me is that I've never been able to evolve from that first album. Now, I always got good responses to the music back then, and when I listen to it now I cringe, because you think of all the things that you could do now. The other thing, I believe, is that what I can do vocally right now is far superior to what I could do back then - of course, I haven't recorded in 30 years. So the frustration is that I don't know how it would have evolved. The four songs I cut, I think, were definitely an evolution from where I was at that point - not that much different, but I think I started to develop a style. But it never progressed beyond that because I didn't record after that period of time.

And one thing I want to make clear, because we hear a lot about musicians losing their hearing because of noise: As much as I would have liked to believe that that was the problem, there were several other factors that were never really eliminated that were involved here. Noise certainly could have exacerbated it, but most noise-related hearing loss takes the top off. I'd had this bizarre hearing loss that killed much of the lower tones. It was in part done either because of the blood vessels bursting or this auto-immune response - it really destroyed that [ability to hear lower tones]. I can hear about a third of the keyboard properly. The rest of it, I hear the over-rings, or I hear the third or the seventh; I don't hear the dominant. So in trying to sing again - I can sit at the piano and sing and play, for the most part, pretty much on key. But if I were to try and sing live with a band, it would be nuts. I couldn't do it.

You couldn't focus or key in on anything.

Yeah. There would be too much interference, and my ears couldn't translate it all - and I had perfect pitch. For me now, because I still have tinnitus in both ears, I already have musical tones in my ears that play 24 hours a day. So, hearing those, then hearing a keyboard and six other instruments and trying to find my voice in the middle of that would be pretty impossible.

At the same time, because of technology right now, I think it's very possible that I could go into the studio - or even sit at my computer - I could probably record again. In fact, your call and other calls I've gotten over the last couple of years - I miss it very much. The thing I miss most - this is a nice long weekend - I'd love to sit in a club somewhere and sing for a couple of hours. But I couldn't do it, because even with me just playing piano I couldn't guarantee I would be on pitch the whole time. It would literally be, "What would you do if I sang out of key? Would you stand up and walk out on me?" [laughs] Well I think people would, you know?

That said, I could probably in a controlled situation and with technology that could adjust anything that's not right, I could probably record again. But I could never go out and perform live again. So, I'm thinking with the Internet and everything, "Why not record an album and release it and sell it online?" If the music is good and people love it, and do that. So what if I can't perform live?

There's a lot to be said for playing music just for the joy of it, regardless of whether you ever play live.

You're absolutely right. I would do it just 'cause I enjoy it. But it is time consuming, and I do have enough music that I've already written that I can go in and just do that and not have to spend a lot of time writing new songs. But the one thing I'm trying not to do is assume that I can go back to that. Rather, I would say that's another aspect of my life - it's another part of my creative life. Now I write and speak and do a lot of other things that I enjoy very much. Music could be a nice piece of that. The music thing - your call and other people's call tell me that it's still there, and I still sing everyday - that would be a nice thing to do. My friend Don Puluse, who was a well-known recording engineer, recently retired, is still around and not far from me, in Boston. There's probably ways we could put those things together. We're not at that point, but given the technology I think that's a possibility.

Let me ask you a question. What attracted you to my record? And it's funny that you mention Jimmie

Spheeris, because you're not the only one... Jimmie Spheeris' [first record *Isle Of View*] and mine, I think, came out about the same time.

Yeah, I bought that Jimmie Spheeris album and yours on the same day back in the early '90s. I was in this used record shop in St. Paul, MN, called The Landfill. I had never heard of either of you, but I bought both because they looked interesting and I recognized some of the session players that worked with you. I listened to the records and was blown away. I remember thinking, "Why haven't I heard this before?" Who is Jimmie Spheeris? Who is Stu Nunnery? Your record label, Evolution, was one I didn't know.

Did you know Neil Harbus?

No.

Neil Harbus was the artist on that label before I was signed, and he was produced by Neil Portnow, head of NARAS [National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences] now. Neil was a good friend, too...

How did you find me recently? Did you Google me?

I've been trying online to find you or some info about you for probably seven or so years. But no success. Right now, I'm looking at an online acoustic guitar forum, and somebody wrote - this is in 2001 - "Anyone know how to play '[Isle Of Debris](#)' by Stu Nunnery?" Then he follows it up with, "Anyone ever heard of Stu Nunnery... besides me?" Then, an answer comes four years later: "If you'd like to chat, I was a hired musician that played with Stu Nunnery in about 1974/1975, or around there. I always considered him one of the most talented writer/composers that just didn't make it." He signs it as "Jack."

Oh. That's interesting. He was my bass player after I had left... his name is Jack Okolowicz. That's right. I saw that, and Jack and I communicated about a year ago. He was my bass player between [my time with] Evolution Records and CBS Records - around 1974-75 when I was playing live.

Another thing: I've watched for 30 years as my records and sheet music have been sold all over the world by peddlers everywhere, and, of course, I haven't seen a dime from that either. All the music that I did, I never saw one dime, which might sound like many other's stories. I still have the tapes. I still own all that stuff and could re-release it tomorrow, and, frankly, I'm thinking about it. It's intriguing to me.

Let's talk about a few songs from your album. The lead-off "[Isle Of Debris](#)" is a classic.

Rock Classic, at KSHE in St. Louis used to play it... it's funny because my ex-wife is from St. Louis; I have friends in St. Louis. For some reason that song really stuck out there. Best story: We had been trying to download my music from the Web, and we've only found two songs. The songs were actually put to videos created by amateur video makers. If you go onto Youtube.com and search for Stu Nunnery, you'll find videos for "[Lady It's Time To Go](#)" and "[Isle Of Debris](#)." Two people - one in St. Louis and one in Brazil - apparently put their own videos to them. I'm wondering if people who are seeing those videos are saying, "Is this Stu Nunnery's video of this song?" Or do they get that it's Youtube?

A couple years ago, I was googling myself and saw an advertisement for Stu Nunnery's first and second album. I never did a second album. I couldn't find it again, but I'm wondering, did somebody record me playing live in a number of different places and cobble together some kind of an album? I don't know.

Is "[Sally From Syracuse](#)" autobiographical?

[laughs] I think anybody that says any song is not autobiographical to some degree is a liar. It's one of the

adages of good writers to write about what you know. It was really inspired by a trip in the early '70s to see a friend in Syracuse, NY, with my wife, at the time. It was my blue period, when I was writing songs, and it just came to me. In many instances some songs write themselves. Well, this one pretty much did. And it was actually the song that got me my first recording contract. It had become a hit at country stations in New York City, where there are lawyers - I can't remember the station there, but they used to get requests from lawyers all the time to play the song. [laughs] Which I thought was great. Autobiographical? No, not to the degree of detail, but inspired by a real event. I was interviewed soon after that - I went up to Syracuse, actually, I was asked to sing "The National Anthem" at a Syracuse football game, which I did not do. And then I got very disparaging letters from women in Syracuse, who thought that I was a sexist idiot. When I had to remind them that this was about a woman who took charge, not me, I threatened that my next record was going to be "Eunice From Utica." [laughs]

The album arrangements are very interesting, and you had a great cast of backing players.

They were very interesting arrangements and were done by Paul Griffin - wonderful stuff. And if you look at the people who played on my album: "Buzzy" Feiten [bass], Hugh McCracken [guitar], Elliot Randall, the guitarist who did [Steely Dan's] "Reelin' In The Years," Rick Marotta [drums], David Spinozza [guitar], John Tropea [guitar] - wonderful musicians - Eric Weisberg [fiddle]. He had just come off "Dueling Banjos." And we had [fiddler] Kenny Kosek - just some great folks on this album, and they did a very good job. When I listen to it and hear all this great music around me, I realize how much I would have loved to be in that atmosphere again and again and again. It would have matured my music even more. I was still shooting pretty much from the hip on that first album.

Have you been approached by any labels wanting to reissue your album on compact disc? It never got a CD release, and it can be challenging to find a good vinyl copy.

I am now thinking about doing something with it. Maybe the thing to do, instead of going in to redo it - because how many times have you heard an album and said, "Shit. That's not as good as the original." I've heard James Taylor recut his songs, and sometimes they haven't been as good as the originals. Or Gordon Lightfoot, who was one of my heroes back in those days, would recut some of his songs, but they didn't have the same soul as the originals. Maybe not mess with the originals?

You mentioned earlier that you still sing everyday. How much, if any, songwriting did you carry on with?

Just before I lost my hearing I got into more - I'm not going to say spiritual music, but more music with some meaning to it. In fact, a couple songs that I wrote I'd very much like to release. I think they're very strong songs as well. They've had that kind of soul to it, that I was moving toward. More global, universal-type stuff. I tend to write that way. In fact, a couple songs on my album - "[Roads](#)," the very last song; "[Isle Of Debris](#)" - people always asked, "Where did that come from?" You know, they were kind of like cautionary tales, and here I was 25 years of age. Where did that come from? I have no idea. [laughs] But clearly that was part of my soul that was being expressed, and I think more of that would have come out. At the same time, I was good at writing clever songs and up-tempo things and love songs. I've written some jazz and other things, so I think there's a lot there that could be done. Who knows, I may be sitting right here in front of my computer someday and composing, finding the software I need and working with a couple old bandmates, and putting some things together online.

I would think the pull would be strong to get back to writing.

Probably the main reason I didn't go back into music was that I had no context after 1983. Since 1983, I have not heard anything that has been recorded. Yes, I've heard it on the radio, but I don't know what key it's in; I don't know what the melody line is; I don't know the chords; and I can barely make out the lyrics. So, I have

no context for what contemporary music sounds like.

You've been frozen in a musical time capsule.

I think that's true, but songwriters are from Mars anyway. [laughs] My job as a writer is to channel whatever comes through me and create some form. But I know that that form may not be contemporary sounding. It may be something that I'm holding onto or connected to. I have no context for what music's been like for almost 30 years. I think I would get more out of reading lyrics, so if all I did was read lyrics of top songs for the last couple years, perhaps I could learn. But I've always been a good lyric writer, so I'm not sure that I would learn anything, because I've never had any reluctance or hesitation to what I could or would say. I've always tried to say something a little bit differently.

I've been a musical virgin for the last 30 years. I don't know what Sting sounds like; I don't know what Madonna sounds like; I didn't hear any of Michael Jackson's newer stuff. I have no context, so I couldn't be derivative! [laughs]

{Stu Nunnery is the director of the Rhode Island Center for Agricultural Promotion and Education (RICAPE). You can read more about his work and the Center's mission at <http://www.rifarmways.org>. Special thanks to Stu for sharing his story and letting me post his music. Let's hope his album will get a long-overdue re-release very soon.}

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[Rob Halford talks Nostradamus, Priest, Rock In Rio & More](#)

October 29, 2008



Vocalist Rob Halford needs little introduction. After more than 35 years in the rock 'n' roll game, his distinctive voice and uncompromising pursuit of perfection have brought him the well-deserved title of metal god. But as fans of Judas Priest and Halford's other projects know, he is capable of far more than just

screaming for vengeance. As evidenced on Priest's latest release, *Nostradamus*, Halford and bandmates take listeners on a musical journey spanning more than two hours, telling the story of the famous prophet in songs both mystical and metallic, orchestral and ominous.

Halford recently spoke with [CRMB](#) about *Nostradamus*, his new DVD project and much more.

Where are you at today Rob?

I'm in San Diego - packing my bags about to fly off down to Mexico and South America this weekend for the next part of the Priest tour.

You've been all over the place this summer, haven't you?

Pretty much, yeah. We've just got a few more shows left to take care of - what's left of this year. And, of course, we're gonna go around again in the early part of 2009 and come to some places we haven't got to on the first leg of the world tour. So we're going back through the U.K. and Europe and North America.

I've been a long-time fan, and I remember first seeing you play live back in the early '80s down in Florida, where I used to live, at the Lakeland Civic Center. I don't know if you remember it?

I *do* remember it. I remember it very vividly, yeah. Is it still there, or was it finally closed down?

I think it was expanded and renamed. But back in the day, that was the place in Florida for rock bands to play.

It *was*. It definitely was. You've still got a bunch of cool places to play down in Florida - Tampa, West Palm Beach - there's still some real solid metal places to work down there, much like all over the United States, really. That's the phenomenon of heavy metal no matter where you go: It's nationwide.

I'd like to talk about the latest Priest album, *Nostradamus*. I think it's the best thing the band has done.

Thank you.

You've referred to this album as a metal opera. Did you ever anticipate working on such a large-scale project?

Well, I don't think any of us anticipated the size of the thing, that's for sure. When we began the writing sessions - Glen and K.K. and myself - all we had as a guide was a timeline of Nostradamus' life, you know. We wanted to try and tell the story of him from the moment he arrived and then through the significant episodes of his life to the final moment, when he passed away. I remember after some weeks of writing, we realized we were already well past the 80-minute limit that you're given with a CD - we'd have to go into the double-CD realm - but we still had so much to say. We didn't want to cut some corners. We kept on writing, and it ended up being an hour and 40 minutes. You might agree, I don't know, but you can sit down and listen to everything - the time flies. It's got this wonderful essence of speed built into it somehow. The music is just going past your ears and through your system, and before you know it you've got to the end section. And that's what pleased us. We didn't want to make it a burdensome listen; we wanted to maintain the interest and the energy and the atmosphere and the adventure without it plodding along.

I want to read a quick review of the album that was posted on Amazon.com, because I agree with it: "Intolerant metal fans will no doubt slog this double CD for its keyboards and overall melody that metal bands simply aren't doing these days. Their loss." I think the way you vary the mood, tempo, dynamics and arrangements across the record makes the heavier moments even more powerful.

Well thank you. I'm glad you observed that. I mean, that's part of the tradition of the band right from the early recordings. We thrive on the melodic moments - that's just in-built with Priest. It just comes from us very naturally. Maybe it's just a reflection of the era and times we grew up in, but we know that a good song has to have a refrain in it, whether in the chorus or in the lead break - whatever it might be - for you to latch onto and get into it.

The reaction has been very kind of mixed and diverse - very passionate responses. There are some Priest fans that only want *Painkiller, Painkiller, Painkiller*, which is fine. If you want to listen to *Painkiller*, throw it in your CD player. But I think, in terms of achievement, this is something we've always wanted to do. We've often talked about making a concept record, but it took until now to personally have the strong structure of an idea - in *Nostradamus* - and secondly have enough time to disappear into the recording/writing realm through almost a two-year period. But it's done now, and we feel very satisfied - we're proud of what we've achieved - and it's out there around the world settling into the psyche of everyone. My gut feeling tells me that in two, three, five years from now, the light will go on and people will go, "Oh yeah. I've got it. I understand what this is all about now." We're all about music. Some of it is instant; some of it takes awhile [to connect with the listener] . That's the joy of listening to music in all the ways that we do.

You've created a soundtrack to Nostradamus' life. His story came to life, almost visually, for me. To do that with music is a real accomplishment.

Thank you. Again, when we work together on the lyrics - that's my job as a lyricist - but I sit down with Glenn and K.K. and we filter out all the best bits. And we utilize the instrumentation for the structure of the song, and it's complete. You've got to be very picky, you know. All of us in Priest are real craftsmen at what we do. We make things that last, in terms of the quality of the material and the effort and the energy and input that goes in. We don't accept substandard anything, from writing to recording to performing on stage. I suppose it's the reason why we're still here all these years later. It's the quality of the work.

Your lyrics have always been very streamlined and precise. Are there any particular songwriters that influenced your approach?

You *know*, you're the first person to ever ask me that question. Nobody has ever asked me about other lyric writers. [laughs] I suppose it's part of my personality. There's a famous saying in the music industry, "Don't bore us, get us to the chorus." But it's true. All of the great things that have lived in music - doesn't matter what it is: classical, jazz, blues - the things that you remember are the hook-y moments, some of the hook-y messages. I suppose, again, that's in-built in me. I mean, I love to talk as you can tell - I can just go on all day about heavy metal; but when it comes to writing the words, I know how to get the message across in a given period of time. That comes down to practice, really, just like a guitar player or drummer. You practice, practice, practice at what you do, and you should get better the longer you're at it.

I've read that you're a frustrated guitar player. Do you ever bring riffs or chord progressions into a writing session?

[laughs] I was noodling on my little - I've got a couple of those little, mini-Fernandez guitars with built-in rhythm boxes. I was noodling on those last night. I have these 2, 3, 4 a.m. sessions with myself in my bedroom. [laughs] That sounds bizarre. [laughs] But, that's what I do. It's fun.

I'm amazed, when I'm standing on the stage watching and listening to what everyone else does, and I wonder, "How do they do it?" I have a hard enough time remembering the words. God knows how Glenn remembers all the notes to the "Painkiller" lead break. It's absolutely mind blowing. But then, we get lost going to the gig. [laughs] We can't figure out what street we're supposed to be on. It's a crazy world.

But I would like to play, and it's silly, really, because I have every opportunity to sit down with two of the

world's greatest players and say, "How do you do this, and how do you do that?" But I've never done that. Maybe it's for the best? I don't know. But I would like to play better than I can play, that's for sure.

What makes the songwriting team of Halford, Tipton and Downing so effective?

I think it's the chemistry. We've said all along that if we had a different lineup, for whatever reason - different writers - Priest would have turned out remarkably different. It's just the magic, whether it's Tipton, Halford and Downing; or Young and Young, from AC/DC; or Lennon/McCartney. It just goes on and on and on - writing teams. It's cool being in a team of writers because, apart from the wonderful things that happen, you're constantly learning and opening yourself up to being less of an egotist. I think the great things come not from compromise, but just from having an open mind. It's exciting, very exciting to be in a room with the three of us. It's when the metal magic, as we call it, happens.

The great unknown. Who knows what's going to come out, right?

That's it. I mean, the day starts with nothing and may end with something that lives forever on a record. That's great.

The band's [Web site](#) has some great concert photos from your U.S. tour. Mark Wilkinson's artwork has translated into a tremendous stage set.

Yeah. He's a tremendous guy, and he's got a wonderful imagination. Once we give him the guidelines of what we're trying to achieve we just let him loose, and he's constantly supplying us with great things. He's a bit like Marc Sasso, who works for me on the Halford stuff. He just comes up with these wonderful artistic endeavors. I think we've worked with Mark going back to the Painkiller days. He's just got a knack for capturing the essence of what we're trying to do, and it does translate into the stage performances, the backdrops and what have you.

Has it been a challenge to take on the road? It's kind of an old-school stage set.

Yeah, it definitely has a retro, '80's vibe to it. It's a nightmare because it costs an enormous amount of money. I mean, God! We could simplify things - just walk out with a drum riser and a few lights - but, you know, that's not what Priest is about. We're famous for putting on these stage shows and giving the fans a memorable night out, of metal. But it is, it's expensive to make and carry around and ship in these big containers and put on trucks. That's why we're always encouraging the fans to support what we do, and to avoid, still this evil, illegal downloading environment. It costs almost \$100,000 a day to keep Priest on the road, and we're not an expensive band compared to somebody like Metallica. We've got a pretty straightforward crew and with all the other dimensions that we do. All of the money that we get back from everything that we put out there, we put back into taking our shows out on the road.

But it looks great - at the end of the day, it looks great. And that's all that really matters. We do it for ourselves, we do it for the fans. We all have a good time with it.

Let's shift to your new DVD, *Resurrection World Tour/Live At Rock In Rio III*. Can you talk about the importance of the Resurrection album and tour with you getting back to your metal roots.

For a lot of people, including myself, it was kind of a welcoming home party. I just found myself to be at that place in my career. I'd had my fun with the Fight band, the experimentation with 2, and Trent [Reznor] and John Lowery. Some people have basically suggested that because everything else was a commercial disaster, you just run back clinging to the lifeline, but that's not the reason. I did the things that were important to me as a musician, to do that soul searching. I found myself in the company of Roy Z for the first time, and discussing where I might go and do next in music. The result of that was finding all the great talent we

connected to, which led to the *Resurrection* album. It's just a great record, you know. Standing outside of it and listening in myself, as a critique of music, I love the songs. It's got a great sound. It's got a very special vibe to it, the whole recording, and I'm really proud of it. It's fun to be able to re-present it again, remastered and remixed, and with a couple of new songs from the sessions that we didn't use. And we wanted to include that with the Rock In Rio DVD visual. It's a whole package, really, and kind of reflective of that whole period of time - the *Resurrection* year.

Commercial success aside, the Fight and Halford projects were well received by the fans, but it wasn't really a great time for hard rock music in general.

You're right. Everything was in transition at that time. I remember the first time I heard "Man In The Box" by Alice In Chains. I thought, "Oh God, this is going to shake things up." And then Nirvana and Pearl Jam and everybody else. It was great for the music system. I love it when exciting, fresh, revolutionary things happen, because it's just a springboard that launches many wonderful things. But yeah, it's true, around that time - the early and mid-90s, everything was in a state of flux. But there's that spine of metal, if you want to call it that, that is hardcore and refuses to give and bend and break. That's the world that I'm related to. That's why they call me the metal god, I guess.

How would you compare playing Rock In Rio to Live Aid?

Of course, the Live Aid audience was a very mixed crowd. It was a wonderful event, the charity purpose, and all the incredible talent that played over the two shows. It was really exciting and a tremendous memory. We've seen those type of shows in many shapes and forms since it happened.

The Rock In Rio - it's all metalheads. And there was a ¼ of a million of them there. By the standard of how many were at JFK [for Live aid], it was an audience three times as big. I mean, you can't relate. You look from the stage, and it's just like an ant field. [laughs] "Are those swarms of ants?" [laughs] The stage is as big as a football pitch, and you just have to put your head down and focus and play your music, and I think that's what happened that night. And now you can feel that vibe when you watch and listen to the DVD.

I noticed that when you came out on stage, you looked so composed. Were you nervous?

No, I wasn't actually, and I don't know why. I never walk out on stage completely placid - there's always some kind of adrenaline. I think I walk out there, that's just generally what I do. Some people go out there jumping and screaming and leaping about like Sebastian Bach, God bless him. He's a great friend of mine. That's his style, like a bottle of champagne about to explode, even before he leaves the dressing room. But for me, it's just a mental process. You know what you've got to do; you're focused on your work, and you just walk out there and let it flow.

The audience participation on "Breaking The Law" is incredible. You just hold the mike, while they sing the entire song.

That was amazing that night. I could feel it even before the song went into the singing section, I could sense that the crowd was ready. You just hand it over to them. It was remarkable. Everybody was singing in English [laughs] - that still amazes me, because, obviously, Portuguese is the language of the Brazilian people. And I'm sure most of them don't speak English, but they know all the words to sing "Breaking The Law." It's unique; it's remarkable - it's sort of the same in Japan, you know. You get the same type of vibe there, people singing every word. It's a magic moment in the DVD. There's a lot of cool bits: the documentary bits, the bit with me and Bruce [Dickinson], that killer little bit of [drummer] Bobby [Jarzombek] doing his audition tape. There's all sorts of little gems that we wanted to include.

Speaking of your performance with Bruce Dickinson. What other vocalists do you admire?

Oh yeah, obviously Priest went out recently on the Metal Masters tour, and Ronnie James Dio is a great friend of mine. I love his voice... Klaus Meine, David Coverdale, Robert Plant, David Bowie, Maynard from Tool, obviously Bruce - there's a ton of them. I do like a good singer, someone who can hold a note and get a melody across.

Coverdale released a new and very good Whitesnake album this year. Both of your voices sound stronger than ever, without any apparent loss of range.

I don't know what that is. Obviously, the voice is an instrument and you have to learn how to use it. It's like learning to play guitar or drums. Once you've got your style down and know what your voice is capable of doing, you find that level of confidence. But you really don't know what's going to happen next. I'm sure David would say the same thing. You know instinctively what you've got to do, without your brain telling you what to do. But your voice can go in totally unexpected places [laughs] because it's a physical part of your body. It's like running down the basketball court and your legs give out. You ask, "Why? What happened?" You're never really quite sure, but it's great. I appreciate your observation on that. We're at the prime, and we're having a great time doing what we do.

Do you sing better live or in the studio?

Oooh. It's definitely two different performances. In the studio you really have to... it's a strange world in the studio. I've always said that if you think too much about what you're doing in the studio, then it will sound that way when you listen to the recorded event. If you can just let yourself go and not think about it, then it comes from the soul, and again you can sense it. And that's always been difficult for me, because I'm such a fucking perfectionist. I drive myself crazy. I'll keep going over it and over it and over it, again and again and again. On the *Nostradamus* release, we did hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of vocal tracks, just because I wanted to get it right. And there was a lot of multi-tracking involved. But it's a different dimension when you're onstage; onstage is a lot more fun. It's a different vibe, different atmosphere. You know you're there to serve a purpose, which can be sometimes people have waited two, three, four, five years for you to come and play for them again. And you better deliver. At the same time, you're having a blast because there's nothing better or more exciting than being in a band and performing live for an audience.

You know how your own voice sounds different to you than others, and, obviously, you're hearing your voice the way we hear it after recording.

Yeah. I can't stand the sound of my own voice.

Really? Does your voice do anything that surprises you when you record?

I'm thinking beyond that. All I'm concerned about is getting the notes right, getting the inflection right, the right range and the tone. That's more important to me than what my voice sounds like. I'm more clinically critical of everything that I do, and everybody that I've worked with has that same attitude. I think that's just professionalism, whether it's Glenn or K.K., or Roy Z or Bobby or Scott - we're absolutely mad and manic about getting it right. But that's professionalism isn't it. In whatever walk of life, you've got to put the effort into it to get the best result. It can take a week to do one song. It can take longer than that.

How does the metal altar of 2008 compare with 1978 or '88?

Well, obviously, there's just been an explosion of different styles and genres of metal, and we're thrilled to be able to observe that. And I'm excited to valuable and relevant and important in the big smorgasbord of the heavy metal world. It's just terrific. At my time of life, it's really heartwarming to see the constant display of new metal talent that's being created. As we speak now, there's probably a band jamming away that we haven't heard of. But in a year from now - five years from now - could be a global phenomenon. That's a

really exciting thing to consider.

So, the fact that metal is strong and proud and worldwide and still there and important, is what makes you feel good, as a grandfather of metal. [laughs] It's wonderful.

(photo courtesy of [Chipster Entertainment Inc.](#))

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[Uriah Heep's Mick Box on Wake The Sleeper](#)

October 20, 2008



Uriah Heep founding member and guitarist Mick Box took time from his busy touring schedule to speak with CRMB about the band's long overdue album, *Wake The Sleeper*, new drummer Russell Gilbrook and more. Read on!

It's been 10 years since you released your last studio album. What took so long for *Wake The Sleeper* to come out?

Mick Box: We released a CD in 1998 called *Sonic Origami*, which was loved by the fans, the press and the record company themselves. However, we had a world tour booked and the record company did not support the CD as they said they would. We decided not to give them another one. We got out of the contract and then the record industry went in to free fall. The record industry attacked the Internet (Napster), and then realized that there were thousands of free download opportunities so they had to re-invent themselves and embrace the Internet.

As part of that reinvention, record companies disappeared, amalgamated, or got smaller, and many people lost their jobs. In all of this turmoil, we could not find a home. When we did it was with Sanctuary Records U.K., who owned our back catalog. We recorded *Wake The Sleeper* and gave them the final masters, only to be told that they had been taken over by Universal. This left us in limbo for the best part of a year and it was a frustrating time for the fans and the band, but luckily, on hearing the CD, Universal decided they wanted to release it. It just goes to show that there is nothing certain about the record industry anymore.

Was there a particular sound or vibe you were going for with this album?

Yes! We did not want to use synths - only the Hammond organ, bass, drums and guitar. We also wanted to go into one room and play the songs as a band and not do it piecemeal. We found a studio in Lincolnshire in the countryside that was called The Chapel. It had the perfect vibe. We rehearsed everything to where the producer Mike Paxman and the band were happy, and then we pressed the

record button. And within three takes, we usually had it in the bag.

Mike Paxman was in the room with you while the band played?

Yeah. He just wanted to be in the vibe of it all. In rehearsals, he was bouncing off the walls. When we got into the studio, the last thing he wanted was to sit in an armchair and listen to it come through a few small speakers, you know. So he came in and put some headphones on and just got in the vibe of it. It was great, seeing him in there. And you really warm to people like that, when they're that involved when you're doing your music.

This is the first Heep record in many years that doesn't feature Lee Kerslake on drums, due to some health problems. Was it strange recording without him?

It was strange not having Lee around after all of these years, and that applies to being on stage, too. However, Russell is very powerful and professional, and he fits in extremely well both on a musical level and a personal level.

How did you choose Russell Gilbrook to replace Lee, and how would you describe his style? Are there plans for Lee to rejoin?

There are no plans for Lee to join. Russell rang Trevor to give him his new mobile number at the time we were doing auditions. Trevor said, "Phone Mick and see if you can come down." We did not want to find a Lee clone, as that would have been wrong. We wanted someone who had their own identity, and after a few days of very frustrating auditions Russell came along and made the drum stool his. We gave everyone three songs to learn instrumentally and vocally – "Between Two Worlds," "Easy Livin'" and "July Morning." Most people were unprepared, and they could not even sing even when they said they could. Russell came in and he had rehearsed five songs that, to be quite honest, we could have taken out on the road right there and then. He really lifted the room.

Along with some killer riffs, this album has some really nice melodic soloing. I don't think that part of your playing gets enough credit.

As far as solos are concerned, they should be an extension of the song but within the context of the song, as well. It's very important to come in with a bit of impact, have something interesting to say in the middle and then have a climax. That's how I treat every solo. I find that a lot of guitarists of today, if you like, when they get a chance to solo, it's like a piece for them. [laughs] And half the time it has nothing to do with the song. It just drizzles out. It's just drizzle. What's the point? You need some shape and structure, but that's old school, isn't it? [laughs]

The best guitar solos are those you can sing along with.

As well, yeah. I mean it's really a very important part of a solo. You're exactly right. I think the other thing, as well, is that with today's guitarists there are a lack of individuals. They all sound a bit the same, now. It's all absolutely, technically brilliant, but it doesn't move me at all. With us, you know, I didn't play like Ritchie Blackmore. Ritchie Blackmore didn't play like Tony Iommi. Tony Iommi didn't play like Martin Barre. Martin Barre didn't play like whoever. You know, Paul Kossoff, for instance, had his own style. And so did the bass players, and so did the drummers, and so did the singers and keyboard players. It was something about style that gave each band its own identity. And I find that missing somewhat today.

Wake The Sleeper is also being issued on vinyl. Was that a band or label decision?

It is a band decision, but Universal were very supportive with this idea.

How did Ioannis come to do the cover art? What input did the band members have on the design?

A guy named Jeb Wright from an Internet site called Classic Rock Revisited suggested him right at the same time I read an interview of Ioannis in *Record Collector* magazine. He was asked if there was any band he would like to work with and he answered Uriah Heep. So, with that coincidence too strong to deny, I got in touch with him. He was true to his word and has produced a very strong cover for us.

I'd like to throw out a deep track from the Heep catalog. "Weep In Silence" has always been one of my favorite tunes.

"Weep In Silence" is actually a good song, off *High And Mighty* you're talking. *High And Mighty*, in essence, I didn't get on well with the album. I can hear it now and appreciate it, but at the time I was hoping it would be a bit more rocking. It was a bit low-key for me, but we decided it would be one of the standout tracks. And an amazing Ken [Hensley] solo on that one. He plays very well on that one.

How about a deep track from your side?

“Salisbury?” You know, back in the old days, we actually did “Salisbury” without the orchestration, and it worked very, very well. It was still powerful, and I think that spoke volumes about the song itself. Some of the passages - even though we had the brass [arrangements] stripped out of it - it still stood up on its own. And I think that’s been a bit of a dark horse. A lot of people, over the years, have come up and told me that *Salisbury* is one of their favorite albums. It has a lovely innocence about it. It’s got a jazzy feeling. There’s a lot of lovely bits in there. I heard it recently, by default [laughs] - cause I never listen to my own stuff - and I was thinking, “This is really driving. It’s great.” And I really enjoyed the energy on it. Loved it.

How would you compare Heep now, with the group 30 years ago?

A very difficult question as the world was a different place back then. I have been blessed that I am still doing this 38 years on, and I have the same passion for it as I had when i was 18, so ‘appy days!

Special thanks to Uriah Heep Web master Dave White for the photo of Mick. You rock Dave!

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[Chris Farlowe interviewed by Rick Wakeman \(1983\)](#)

October 20, 2008

A very cool blast from the past as keyboard wizard Rick Wakeman chats with vocalist Chris Farlowe, of the Thunderbirds, Colosseum, Atomic Rooster, as well as his own solo efforts.



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- Jason on [Alan Parsons Project - Six expanded editions reviewed](#)
- David on [10 Best Rolling Stones' songs](#)
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- Andrew on [Iain Ashley Hersey - Nomad](#)
- [the toasters band | Digg hot tags](#) on [Mahogany Frog - DO5 review](#)



- [Jason](#): Awesome Review! I've checked out most of the bonus material on the dusted off albums and it really does...
- [David](#): Wow, very good list. More often than not, I'll step aside from commenting on another person's...
- [Barry Adams](#): Timothy Hildebrandt, it's great to see your name and hear so much of the background I really never...
- [Andrew](#): Very cool...never heard of him before. Thanks!
- [Red Oscar](#): I grew up with Deep Purple in the 60's and 70's. Their early stuff is classic. Still, I find...

• Links

- [Allman Brothers Band](#) - Official Allman Brothers Band Web site
- [April Wine](#) - Official April Wine Web site
- [BGO Records](#) - Beat Goes On Records Homepage
- [Black Crowes](#) - Official Web site of The Black Crowes
- [Bob Dylan](#) - Official Bob Dylan Web site
- [Cheap Trick](#) - Official Cheap Trick Web site
- [Deep Purple](#) - Official Deep Purple Web site
- [Focus](#) - Official Focus Web site
- [Friday Music](#) - Where Classic Rock Lives
- [Gentle Giant](#) - Official Gentle Giant Web site
- [Good Rats](#) - Official Web site of The Good Rats
- [Jade Warrior](#) - Official Jade Warrior Web site
- [Jan Akkerman](#) - Official Jan Akkerman Web site
- [Jethro Tull](#) - Official Jethro Tull Web site
- [Kansas](#) - Official Kansas Web site
- [Kim Mitchell](#) - Official Kim Mitchell Web site
- [King Crimson](#) - Official King Crimson Web site

- [Klaatu](#) - Official Klaatu Web site
- [Marillion](#) - Official Marillion Web site
- [Music Video Distributors](#) - Music Video Distributors Homepage
- [Nazareth](#) - Official Nazareth Web site
- [Neil Young](#) - Official Neil Young Web site
- [Nektar](#) - Official Nektar Web site
- [Nightwatcher's House Of Rock](#) - Music Reviews, Interviews, News, Viewpoints And Much more... Showcasing the very best in rock, blues and beyond.
- [Pat Travers Band](#) - Official Pat Travers Web site
- [Peter Frampton](#) - Official Peter Frampton Web site
- [Richard Thompson](#) - Official Richard Thompson Web site
- [Rick Wakeman](#) - Official Rick Wakeman Web site
- [Rory Gallagher](#) - Official Rory Gallagher Web site
- [Rush](#) - Official Rush Web site
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