

# TWO THOUSAND A.D.

## I sliced off the tip of the index finger on my left hand

whilst engaged in a domestic task. In the hospital, it was 'Will I be able to play the guitar again, Doc?'. Actually, it's improved matters as that particular digit is now desensitized which makes holding down chords less painful when I haven't touched the instrument for a while. Perhaps I ought to do the same to the other fingers.

There were, nevertheless, a few twinges when I next performed - on the Isle of Wight during what the Russians call the 'old wives winter'. As my usual accompanist, Chris Gore, couldn't make it, I dared to ring Dick Taylor, guitarist with The Pretty Things, who lives in Ventnor to the south of the island. To my surprise, he volunteered to help out - and so I sent him a tape and the "sheet music" and hoped for the best.

Of course, Dick was brilliant, the best guitarist with whom I've ever trod the boards. I could scarcely believe it was happening as I'd first known him as a figure on a TV screen when I was a teenager - but there he was, backing me at Dimbola Lodge, one of the most peculiar venues I've yet played. In Freshwater Bay - on a stormy night with the sea crashing outside and no street lights - it was less an auditorium than a tea house with antique porcelain on the shelves, a Steinway concert grand and Pre-Raphaelite paintings (including a Ford Madox Brown original) on the walls. Tennyson used to give readings there - and I wondered what he'd have made of Dick and I, especially as we did a couple of Pretty Things hits during the proceedings.

Fortunately, we went down well enough to be rebooked for October. A further spin-off was that this was the location for the another Clayson bootleg. Dick was mildly perturbed by this, but I was immensely flattered. I suppose it was motivated by the presence of one who is not only a Pretty Thing, but also a founder member of the Stones. Nevertheless, Geoff Wall of *Folk On Tap* (regional journal), the bloke who taped it also caught a show I managed without Dick (but with Fran Wood of Poacher's Pocket) in a Southampton club called The Talking Heads on Halloe'en night. In existence, therefore, are two more Clayson CDs, (see [Bootlegged](#))

In parenthesis, 'Pagan Mercia' re-appeared in July on a compilation album, *Airs And Places: The Sound Of People And Music In Berkshire* on Corridor Records (e-mail: [corridor@dircom.co.uk](mailto:corridor@dircom.co.uk)), and Wired, a local studio solicited me to re-record 'The Moonlight Skater' (that again!) - to which I added a new bridge section for release *next* Christmas. They're nothing if not prepared. This time round, it features real 'cellos, violins and woodwind instead of the synthesizers on the *Soiree* version.

Other engagements have included a Brel show in Winchester, one in my own right at TGV, a 'chanson' club in a North London art gallery - and judging a talent contest at Sonning Rugby Club. I didn't stay long at the latter, storming out when the MC introduced me as 'a man who's had more whores than Jeffrey Archer' (recently disgraced UK politician). I've always been far too stingy and arrogant to pay for sex.

Something as sordid in its way was *Dusty: The Musical*, which I had to review in May. It wasn't a 'musical' so much as a straightforward Dusty Springfield tribute concert divided into three periods that climaxed with her solo years. There was no insight whatsoever into Dusty The Person during interminable links by a stultifyingly unfunny compere who not so much cracked jokes as made obscene statements. It was, however, tremendous Theatre of Embarrassment. He alienated both an extremely vocal section of the audience and the theatre staff, who ensured that he didn't reappear in the second half. This was disappointing as he'd probably have been lynched. Would Dusty

have approved? I doubt it - though in the title role, Karen Noble looked like someone who looked like Dusty, and if you shut your eyes, she was almost-but-not-quite indistinguishable from the real thing.

More alarming was an encounter with Lonnie Donegan. It didn't begin like that - because Lonnie, though a most entertaining and amusing fellow, was sixty-eight years old with a history of heart problems. I met him, his manager and his manager's wife in a Covent Garden restaurant for a *Record Collector* interview. I'm not making this up, but the cassette machine was running and we were working our way through the main course, when who should turn with two 'minders', but a certain Belfast-born entertainer (who'd recently assisted on a Donegan album recorded in Reading of all places). Needless to say, my concentration was split as the newcomer - as broad as he is tall and very unprepossessing - ordered a fruit salad and launched into a whispered row with Lonnie's manager. I risked asking him a question - 'Why did you chose a studio in Reading?' - to which he replied with a curt 'It wasn't my idea. It was Roger's'. I returned to the conversation with Lonnie. Next time, I looked across the table, the Irishman's chair was empty and the fruit salad untouched. He'd been there less than ten minutes.

Within an hour, I was watching Lonnie's appearance at a showcase for Sequel Records at some club down Drury Lane. He was on a bill that included The Real Thing and some famous boy-band. Without exception, he cut them all to pieces with nothing that hadn't been a huge smash for him ('Rock Island Line', 'Putting On The Style' and so forth [though there was no 'My Old Man's A Dustman']), delivered with a sort of intense energy that made you think that it's no wonder he had heart attacks.

Another sexagenarian whose orbit I entered with my journalist's hat on was Jimmy Carl Black, 'the Indian of the group', namely The Mothers Of Invention. He is now 'featured singer' in a Frank Zappa tribute band, The Muffin Men, who were on in a huge pub functions room off London's South Circular road. Most of them are from Liverpool, and, if it was slightly disconcerting to hear 'Hungry Freaks Daddy' and 'My Guitar Wants To Kill Your Mama' in Scouse accents, it was a thoroughly diverting night's entertainment.

A few miles west to Twickenham, Inese - my 'constant companion' - and I spent a less interesting few hours at the opening night of the Eel Pie R&B club, which was all 'I Got My Mojo Working', 'Hoochie Coochie Man' and 'Route 66' by the likes of Don and Keith from The Downliners Sect and Art Wood - who has a famous brother in Ted of Bob Kerr's Whoopee Band. The other Wood sibling, Ron of the Rolling Stones, didn't show but latter-day Yardbird Ray Majors 'exchanged licks' with Steve Hackett from Genesis (causing Inese to wonder aloud why Steve left out 'Young Girl', the one he did with The Union Gap).

This I reviewed for *The Beat Goes On*, but it never appeared for the excellent reason that *The Beat Goes On* ceased publication and the editors fled to Spain, owing money to all the contributors. As this door closed, another opened when I was commissioned to write a regular column in *Record Buyer*, a magazine intended to take a piece of the market action from *Record Collector*. This means that I am being courted by record companies desirous of exposure for their merchandise. The result is not a postal delivery going by without up to half-a-dozen CDs thumping onto the doormat.

In May, I also made a debut as an obituarist for *The Guardian* with a feature concerning Geoff Goddard, a songwriter remembered chiefly for 'Johnny Remember Me', a British chart-topper for John Leyton in 1961. Geoff, however, finished up as a sweeper-upper in the University of Reading's catering department.

Of several other obituaries I have completed since then, two more have concerned the latest of an uncanny number of comparatively early deaths among artists whose recording careers began at Joe Meek's studio. As you know, David Sutch died last year, but Heinz, Geoff Goddard, Alan Caddy (Tornados) and Kim Roberts have all gone in the interim. It's been enough for *The Independent On Sunday* to approach me to write a feature about 'the Joe Meek Curse'. They want me to run it to coincide with the anniversary of Joe's suicide next February.

On a cheerier note, Ken Howard - once co-writer of hits by The Honeycombs (one of Meek's latter-day clients) and Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Tich - has resurfaced as producer/director of a Channel 4 series entitled *Rock Routes*. Out of the blue, he rang to request my participation. So it was that I was a 'talking head' on national television in August. As luck would have it, we were then on holiday in the only region in the kingdom to which the programme wasn't transmitted. However, my eldest son Jack was able to video it - because 'we' meant Inese, Harry (Jack's brother) and I. This summer, see, Jack remained at home as he was working at Office World so that he could go on holiday to Greece with his girlfriend, Donna (and her parents, I hasten to add).

The house was suspiciously clean and tidy when we got back, but Inese and I thought it best not to probe too deeply into Jack and Donna's antics while we were away.

Both Jack and Harry are now in the sixth form at school as Harry too did well in his GCSEs. He's studying Psychology, Sociology and Media Studies, and has just started a Saturday job at a local supermarket.

Such events are causing Inese and I to feel very middle-aged. Time seems to be speeding up to the extent that we seem to be eating breakfast every half-hour. I turned forty-nine on May the 3rd, a date more significant than it will be in in 2001 - because forty-nine (seven times seven) is supposed to be your 'climacteric' year, according to the Druids. It certainly was for Charles I, executed on his forty-ninth birthday at 8 a.m., probably before he'd even had a chance to play with his presents.

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