

The story behind the making of

# Promised Land

by Richard Lamplough

The first few months of 2006 were a pretty desperate time for me. For most of 2005 I had been dogged by a terrible depression that condemned me to a monochrome, monosyllabic life sapping me of energy, optimism and laughter. The new year seemed to offer no possibility of any change.

I was hanging on to my job purely because my boss was so supportive and was convinced, like all my close friends and family, that my condition was temporary. And after waiting for what seemed like an entirety for cognitive behavioural therapy via my GP, I was finally receiving regular support for an hour a week.

The Brazilian student that was said therapist was doing her best to turn my thinking round. But it wasn't easy for her. "Why don't you pop down to Sound Minds to see if they can offer you anything?" she said wearily at the end of one particularly painful session.

So that's where I found myself, one grey February morning being "interviewed" by one David Cuthbert to see if Sound Minds could help me get back on track. For most of my professional life I have spent many grey February mornings interviewing people with varying additional needs to see if my small organisation was the right one to help them get their lives on track. I have to say, with the boot on the other foot, it felt pretty weird.

But I wasn't one to turn down any professional help; I always believed my mental health issues were cognitive rather than chemical and any activity that could maybe turn my thinking around had to be better than shoving an array of anti-depressant drugs into my system.

I found myself playing keyboards in a band called Some Think Monkey? with my new pals Vanessa (vocals), Steve (lead guitar), Simon (rhythm guitar) Charlie (drums) and Sound Minds top banana Paul Brewer (bass). I suppose I was the session man, adding a few piano and organ noises to our Prozac punk and Battersea blues.

Trotting down to Sound Minds once a week

was part of my therapy, as was carrying out musical director duties for a local kids' production of the Wizard of Oz and toying with digital photography in preparation for a possible venture into self-employment. Most of it seemed pretty pointless because I was utterly convinced I would never get better.

But then, suddenly, I got better.

Well I say suddenly - what's most likely is that the various behavioural changes I had put in place over the previous months had had the desired drip-drip effect. Finally, they had soaked through to the positive part of my brain. And there was an epiphany moment that seemed sudden and completely joyous. I was working on retouching a photographic portrait of my best friend's son at the time and almost literally felt the weight of depression slide from my shoulders to my feet and disappear through the cracks in the floorboards.

Five minutes later I threw the remains of my antidepressants into the bin, skipped down to my GP's surgery to tell him the news, bought myself a fine bottle of wine, returned home and put on the Beatles. And they had never sounded so good.

This account will, I promise, very soon move into what it's meant to be about, but I needed to set a little context first. It will all make sense in a matter of moments.

As springtime came my recovery showed no signs of any sort of reversal. Some Think Monkey? now had a keyboard player who regularly switched to bass when he felt like it, added his two-penny's worth of opinion, and smiled like a kid in a sweet-shop most of the time, even if much of the music wasn't quite his favourite sweet. The kids at the Wizard of Oz now had an MD who put every ounce of energy and creativity into getting the very best out of their performances.

As for my venture into self-employment; yes, it happened. I took a redundancy package from my employer and set myself up as a writer/photographer/designer mainly within the voluntary sector although like most freelancers, would take work from anyone who would pay me.

My first three or four months proved to be a steep learning curve, but by the summer I felt my confidence in my working life had completely returned. And when I work well I play well. And that means I can follow the yellow brick road to find my friends in The Fake Lazy Supernovas.

My first album, *Like The Young And Brave Do*, had been completed about five years earlier and since that time I had made a slightly different, if totally unsuccessful, foray into dance/pop with a female vocalist.

I wanted to go back to making an album for me. I mulled over what tracks I wanted, acknowledging that whilst it was fine to go with many of my favourite old songs I needed to leave enough space for any new ones that came along. I mulled more than Malcolm the Muller from the Mull of Kintyre. And if I wasn't mulling about the choice of tracks I was mulling about the musical approach I wanted to take because the two went hand in hand.

I decided the essential difference between the way I recorded *Like The Young And Brave Do* and the way that I wanted the new album would be the sense of liveness. I wanted a crazy drummer, a groovy bass player, and a rainbow guitarist. I also wanted a trio of sweet soul female backing vocalists and a gospel choir.

Not much then.

The good thing about the new album would be that I would have no time deadlines to beat myself up with. Sure, I would want to be moving into mix mode a year or so after I had started recording the songs, but I would never be prescriptive. The most important thing would be to get the musicianship and vocals right. I kept saying to myself "Make the album you've always wanted to make and don't settle for anything less." The album should become my Promised Land.

I found my crazy drummer relatively early on. In June 2006 Some Think Monkey? were playing a mental health awareness gig on Camberwell Green. I have two main memories of the day. One: lugging my keyboard and keyboard stand on and off buses in sweltering Saturday heat. Two: meeting Red Fox.

I think the band must have played six or seven songs out of our ten-song set when Red Fox sauntered on to the stage to replace Charlie on drums. Apparently, it had been sort of planned in the Some Think Monkey? way of planning and Red Fox sort of knew the songs. The last bit didn't really matter anyway - he just flew off in the direction he wanted to go with Paul, Steve and me hanging on to his tail feathers as best we could. (As memory serves me, Simon gave up after the first mile or so.)

Within ten minutes I thought I had found my drummer. And when we chatted afterwards I knew for certain. His character matched his drumming: fiery, unpredictable, occasionally brilliant, alcohol-reliant, and very likable. We exchanged numbers and shook hands on saying goodbye. Yes, there was always a chance he would lose his mobile. Yes, there was always a chance he would be stabbed in the heart by a bitter ex-lover. And yes, there was always a chance that he would be chased out of South London by a pub landlord fed up waiting for him to settle his bar tab. But I was prepared to take my chances in the hope that my album would get the drummer it deserved.

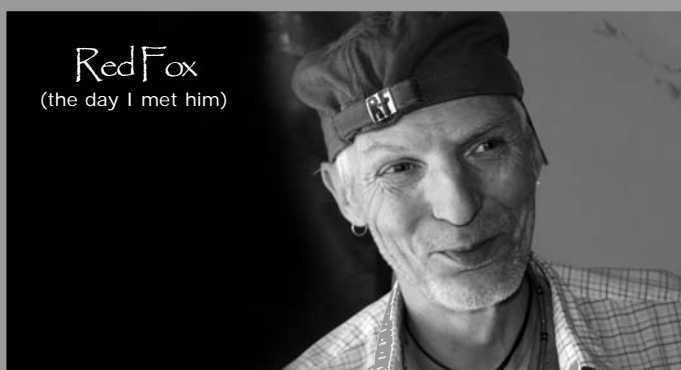
Having found Red Fox, I felt I could relax. I wasn't sure which musician would weave their way into the Fakes next, bass player or guitarist, but I felt confident one or both would surface before long. And this confidence meant that in July I started work on recording the album itself.

I had masses of work to do before even thinking about asking in other musicians. I also had to make various equipment purchases (principally, a valve pre-amplifier and a couple of compressors) to ensure my home studio was fit for purpose, bearing in mind the expected influx of drummers, guitarists, and gospel choirs.

And what of the gospel choirs?

In 2006 I was in two: the first, a large one, I joined as part of the therapy thing detailed earlier and the second, a much smaller one, I joined as a direct result of having such a blast with the first.

I have always loved singing, harmony singing in particular, but traditional choirs don't really do it for me. This is mainly because most traditional choral pieces send me to sleep. I say most... if you offered me a chance to sing in a half-decent choir due to perform Fuare's Requiem, I'd bite your baton off.



Gospel choirs wake me up.

Some gospel songs, with their vocal arrangements that give them their character, are so breathtakingly beautiful I get goose bumps. Of course, there will always be a few that don't inspire me, but out of the fourteen songs we were rehearsing at Morley College Gospel Choir early in 2006, eight or nine were completely sublime.

There were three good reasons for me pitching up at Morley every week to sing my heart out. That was the first one; I sang my heart out. In a perfect world, Morley would have had a bass section (my natural home) but they didn't so I had to do my stuff in the tenors. And wow, that was tough sometimes, it was just so damn.... **high**.

In a two hour class, the time that we actually sang, as opposed to just walking through the parts, never exceeded an hour and twenty minutes. That was fine with me; any longer and I would have been reduced to some sort of melted vanilla ice cream. Or perhaps, I scream. Either way, it was perfect preparation for me recording my own vocals for *Promised Land*, however far away that time was.

The second good reason for me singing with Morley was that I was singing alongside some truly wonderful vocalists. Four or five of the girls would sing solos, and some of them were fantastic. I would position myself on the right hand side of the tenors to get the best possible stereo and being right next to the altos meant I was hearing some of the choirs best singers close up. And, of course, I'd be telling big fat lies if I wasn't making a few mental notes of who could become future Fake fatales.

The third reason was the music social scene the choir offered me. Most Monday evenings a pile of us would troop round to the Three Stags, five minutes walk away, after the choir had finished where there would always be a jazz jam going on. A few of the girls from Morley would usually sing a number or two, and I would often meet good musicians, many of whom would invite me to their own particular gig on another evening.

Some months after joining the Gospel choir at Morley College, I was invited to pop along to a much smaller outfit called Vox Simba who, thankfully, arranged their harmonies to include bass parts. Because the choir was so small, there were only three of us in the bases so there was no hiding place. If I strayed into flat or sharp territory or if I got

my breathing all wrong I stuck out like a rather large white thumb. (I was the only white person in the choir.)

Vox Simba challenged me enormously. I felt honoured to be part of it, even though my particular style of vocal could never be described as Gospel, or Soul (although I like to think I sing from my soul!)

We used to rehearse in a largish room that I think was part of a Methodist church just off the Edgware Road. Whilst it wasn't the best journey in the world for me, it could have been worse. The most hassle-free way to get there was to take two buses, and the journey would take about an hour.

I used the time well, taking a notebook to scribble down my thoughts on how my tracks on *Promised Land* were progressing, any ideas I might have for them, and even how I envisaged the final track order on the album. (Not surprisingly, that changed from week to week.)

The summer of 2006 felt great for me. In many ways I regarded recording the album as work; the problem was I had difficulties with the discipline needed to find and carry out work that actually paid me. I had one main contract to keep me going but the work was so dreadfully dull I would do anything to avoid doing it.

As the months went by my bank statements began to look very samey indeed: plenty coming out, but very little going in. It seemed, however, I was money-blind. I was enjoying the early stages of making the album so much it didn't really bother me. With hindsight, perhaps I should have, but only the year previously I had been so desperately unwell, I was happy simply to be firing on all cylinders again.

I was meeting plenty of musicians, but was still unsure what I should do about my lack of a guitarist. One balmy evening in early August, I decided to go an acoustic night at the Bedford in Balham. I hadn't been down for a few weeks, and, if nothing else, it was a way to look for new business and contacts. I would take my camera with me, get masses of shots of the various solo-artists on stage, send them some images a week or so later, and hope we could work something out that might earn me a few quid.

That particular evening, I felt lucky. It was as if an inner voice was telling me I would meet someone special. I popped my camera in my bag, walked the forty minutes to the

venue, timed my arrival for the start of the first act, and got to work. The first few performers were average, as I remember, but because they only sang three or four songs there was never time to get bored. Besides, if I found myself stifling a few yawns, I simply focused on getting some more interesting photos of the performers.

The third act on was somebody called Tim Stone. For the first song, I don't think I actually took any photos. I didn't want the noise of my camera interfering with the quite astonishing rhythms he was creating on his guitar. I think guitarists use the phrase "hammer on."

*To hammer on (verb)*

I hammer on  
You hammer on  
He hammers on  
We hammer on  
You hammer on  
They hammer on.

But once we hear Tim Stone hammer on we all might as well fucking give up.

It was as if everyone's jaw dropped at the same time. I think, like me, most people couldn't quite believe what they were seeing or hearing.



By the second song I decided hammer or no hammer I better get on and take some photos and, if I say it myself, I got some absolutely some stunning pictures.

I introduced myself to Tim afterwards, showed him a few of the best shots on the viewer, and we got chatting. We seemed to hit it off immediately, exchanged numbers, and made a loose arrangement to get together within two or three weeks and start working together on a favours-for-favours basis.

I walked home that evening on a complete high, and it had nothing to do with the number of beers I shared with Tim. I knew the Fakes had their man.

As the summer drew to a close my plans for *Promised Land* were becoming more defined. My work on the songs was coming along well, and as I worked the final list was becoming clearer in my head. A few songs were falling by the wayside, usually because I was writing some new material that I felt was better.

As for my choice of singers and musicians, that was taking shape too. When I asked Red Fox for any bass player recommendations he suggested asking Sir David Cuthbert, the same Sir Cuthbert who interviewed me at Sound Minds at the beginning of the year. I popped the question to David when I felt I knew him well enough to ask him. He didn't hesitate in saying he would be happy to help out. I didn't even need to hear him play. I just knew he would be right.



I can't say that building my roster of singers was easy; it wasn't, it was bloody difficult. There were a number of reasons for this. Sure, I was singing in two gospel choirs, and there were plenty of good singers in each. But my main issue was that I didn't want *good*.

I wanted very good. I wanted singers that once taught their parts could sing them again and again without going flat or losing their timing. Plenty of girls sang solos at Morley, and whilst some them I knew would be perfect for the Fakes, others simply weren't good enough.

And once I identified those that I felt would be perfect it wasn't particularly easy to approach them. You need to bear in mind in some cases I barely knew them, apart from to smile at, say "hello", "goodbye", and "your solo sounded great tonight, by the way."

Typically my approach might be something like: "Hi there, we don't know each other very well, and you probably live on the other side of London to me, but would you like to sing on my new album? I'm not sure I would be able to pay you very much, but maybe I could take some portrait photos of you, or perhaps record one of your songs... Umm.... Anyway would you think about it?" You see a few of my problems don't you? To be fair, many people seemed genuinely interested, but the logistics made it impossible.

Firstly, they didn't know me very well. Secondly, they would be balancing busy home lives and work lives. Thirdly, they might live as far away as Tottenham in the north east of London, or Hounslow in the west. To expect them to trek over to a home studio set-up in Wandsworth that, as far as they were concerned, might have turned out to consist of nothing more than a twenty year old four-track cassette machine was unrealistic.

To hope that three of them would be able to come over just for one evening was perhaps pretty possible. But to expect that the same girls could do session after session was pretty ridiculous. And as for organising nine vocalists to come over for a whole day, my brain was struggling to cope.

But I had to try, and I was achieving what could have been called a *slow build*. By the time I was at my busiest writing and arranging backing vocal parts for the plethora of songs that needed them, I had an impressive list of singers who, in principal,

had agreed to sing for me, if we could work out the practicalities.

From Morley College Choir, I felt fairly positive I would be working with Aisling Stephenson, Collette Allen, Katarina Sandell, Sarla Vale, Ulanah Morris and Vita Karabalina. From Vox Simba I had received positive responses from Alison Thompson, Cecilia Wickham-Anderson and Lola Phillips. Finally, I had met Wayetta B at the jazz jam at the Three Stags, and an old friend of mine, Marvel Opara, also said she would love to have a sing with me.

Perhaps at this point I should expand a little more of my take on the whole white/black thing in the world of backing vocals. I have always loved the sound of soulful, almost gospel female backing vocals behind quite a white, almost *non-soulful* lead male vocal. There has been no other album that has influenced me more in this sphere than David Bowie's sublime *Young Americans*.

Fine... but why, as I was putting together my backing vocal team for *Promised Land* was I so obsessed that it should be (almost) totally black? I can only answer that by painting this picture for you.

Let's say you have London's twenty most successful and busy session female vocalists turning up at your house on a sunny Sunday. As it happens ten are white and ten are black. So, you put the ten white girls in one room, and you put the ten black girls in another. You give both groups of girls the same song to prepare, Aretha Franklin's *You Make Me Feel Like A Natural Woman*. You assign one girl from each group to sing the lead vocal, and the other nine to sing the backing vocals.

By good fortune, Luther Vandross has popped round for Sunday lunch and he's brought arrangements for sopranos, altos and tenors. So that's handy. In each group you can have three girls for each part.

So, you leave the girls to it, and pop back an hour later to hear the final results. I promise you the black girls' version will sound more like the real deal. And if I had to try to explain that *technically*, probably the best I could come up with would be to say: "It's all about the vibratos."

I am not saying white people, male and female, cannot sound soulful or *black*. Throughout the history of modern music, there have been many shining examples. Indeed, in my gang, Kat Sandell is one such

singer. When I first heard Kat do her solo on the traditional gospel classic *Oh Happy Day* at Morley I had to keep rubbing eyes to check she really was white.

I am also not saying that some of my favourite female singers aren't white. From the golden age of jazz, my top three singers (in no particular order) are Julie London (white), Ella Fitzgerald (black) and Peggy Lee (white). In my gang one of my favourite singers was Vita Karabalina, a white girl from Kazakhstan who came to the UK via a music college in Saint Petersburg.

When I first heard Vita sing a song, solo, at the jazz jam I totally fell in love with her voice. I always knew she would never feature as part of my *soulful* gang, but I also knew I would find a place for her on *Promised Land* somewhere.

So, I've harped on about the black and white thing long enough. To sum up: while there would be plenty of space for white girls on *Promised Land* what I needed most was black girls.

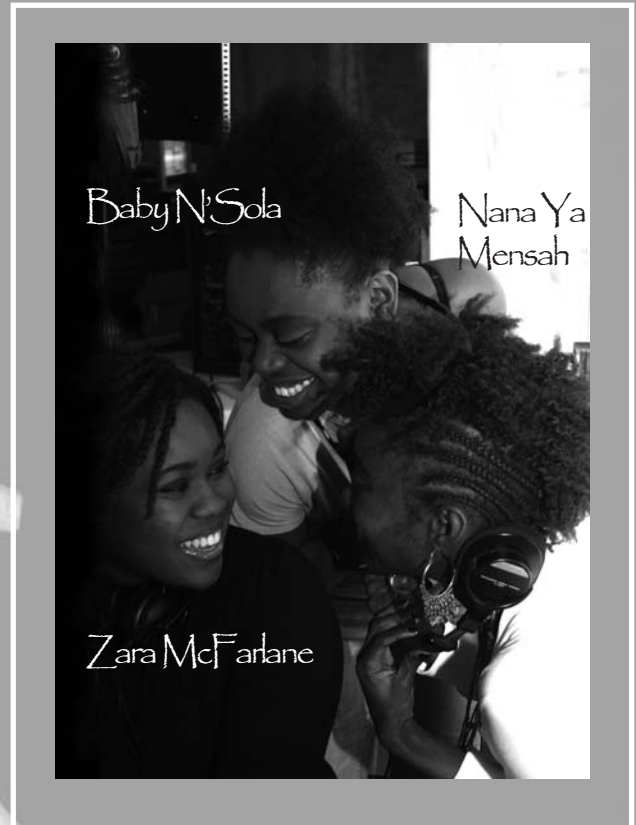
And while my list of potential featured singers was looking healthy, I still had one major concern. I hadn't come near to finding the girls who could be the *main three*, putting aside the big gospel choir thing for a moment. I was practically certain that these would be girls who would need to be doing music if not as their main job, then as their part-time job. Crucially, they would need to be free on days during the working week to come to the flat and record together.

I decided to change tack in the way that I found my golden three. I spent a morning sending emails round to recording studios in London. I gave them a quick brief of the type of vocalists I was looking for citing the *Young Americans* album example. Did they know anyone? Could they have a quick look at the business cards session vocalists tend to leave at recording studios and email me a few details?

The music business being the music business, I expected a sluggish response and a pretty low number of replies in total. I was proved wrong... people know people and people are often prepared to help other people.

Within a couple of weeks I had auditioned, separately, Nana Ya Mensah, Zara McFarlane and Baby N'Sola. In fact, it was Zara who introduced me to Baby. All three sounded ideal, with slightly different ranges giving me

an easy choice to make in terms of soprano, alto and tenor. (Zara, Nanaya, Baby, in that order, if you're interested.) I agreed the same session fee for each girl, and had a good idea of each of their work diaries to see how we could plan the remainder of 2006 and the early part of 2007.



Dear reader, have I sent you to sleep yet?

I think I have explained pretty well the foundations of *Promised Land*. But to give this account the detail I feel it needs (almost guaranteed to send you to sleep) I will move on to tell the story behind the recording of each track. I will also explain a little about how I wrote each song, and maybe what the song's about.

The most logical order to detail the songs is the order in which they appear on the album. However, I need to move *Time I Suppose For Sex* to somewhere near the very end. I will explain more about this later. The main reason is that I wrote this song towards the end of my *Promised Land* journey. In addition, it doesn't quite follow the recording *formula* of the other songs on the album.

Right then, so having probably confused you totally let's get started, wind the clock back to the late 1980s and preach the sermon about one of my favourite songs that I've ever written: *Criminal Crack*.

# Criminal Crack

1987 was a golden year of song-writing for me. I wrote a batch of songs that thrilled me, and always knew I wanted to make professional recordings of them that I could release in the future. In 1987 I had a keyboard, a keyboard module, a four-track tape recorder, a tiny drum machine, a cheap microphone and a reverb unit. I learned masses with this little set up and spent hours on my recordings. Energetic and interesting they might have been, but **professional** they certainly were not!

Two of my 1987 songs, *Words Are Falling*, and *The Sweetest Taste* didn't necessarily need "real" drums. These two songs ended up on my album *Like The Young And Brave Do* that I recorded between 1998 and 2001. But if these two songs sounded fine using programmed drums I had four songs from 1987 that definitely needed the real thing, and *Criminal Crack* was the first of these.

I have always loved *Criminal Crack*. My love of the song revolves around the feeling of space the chord changes and key changes give me. I can remember, as if it was yesterday, the day I wrote it. I was having some building alterations done to the flat. My musical equipment, my bed, my microwave and my kettle were all crammed into my front room. When I got up in the morning chances are I would tread rather uncomfortably on either a screwdriver or the previous night's take-away.

We've all been there, right?

There was one particular morning when I didn't feel like getting up at all. The flat was a tip, my music career seemed to be going nowhere, and it was a miserable day outside. The builders weren't coming that day because they were "waiting for a delivery". (We've all been there, right?) I could have stayed in bed all day and nobody would have known.

But what good would have staying in bed all day done me? As I lay in bed staring at the ceiling a couple of lines came into my head that made me smile: "Hey, hey, it's a criminal crack! There's not much front to lying on your back." I leaped out of bed, switched on the keyboard and came up with a rather grand, church-like introduction chord sequence in C major. Then, as if guided by my angel of key changes my hands slipped into an F minor movement and I started humming a verse melody.

Following this, I returned to the church for the bridge, and wrote quite an unusual chord sequence for an *in yer face* rock type of chorus. The reason why I say it's unusual is because while the chords change on top, the underlying bass note (their root) never does. The melody came to me as naturally as the chord changes.

Then I came up with a new chord sequence incorporating an interesting key change for a short middle eight, returned to the chorus, and hey ho, the song was done.

The lyrics flowed easily enough and remained unchanged until I looked at the song nineteen years later. The main chorus hook was always meant to be a lyrical swipe at me, to tell me to get off my back and do something with my life. But no matter how many times I tried to convince myself otherwise, I knew most people would interpret the lyrics as me giving some sort of lecture to a prostitute. And that was never what the song was about! So I came up with a lyrical change that I was happy with and what appears on the final song.

*Criminal Crack* was one of those songs that I always felt could be a biggy and in the nineteen years since I wrote it there had been two demo recordings; a 1988 rather muddy portastudio version and a 1990 much cleaner, more clinical interpretation that I recorded on my first computer. I still had the programming information for this version if I needed it but, in fact, it was always the portastudio version that held a particular magic for me.

I am somewhat of a hoarder. There have been bits and pieces of studio equipment that I have sold or scrapped over the years of course, because they had been superseded by something more advanced technically, but most things I have kept. I have a keyboard module from the time I wrote *Criminal Crack* that I still rely on for a few of my favourite things.

As for my creative output that, over the years, has ended up on analogue tape, digital tape, floppy discs (remember those?) computer cartridges or hard drives I never scrap anything. Actually, that's not strictly true. I think about five years ago I took a trip to the tip with an eight-track reel to reel one inch tape of a song I released in 1981. But that was only because I didn't have a tape recorder to play it on and had no intention of buying one. In fact, if you ever spot eight-track machine these days, you'll most likely see it in a museum.

In the mid eighties four-track cassette recorders, often called *Portastudios* were all the rage for bedroom pop producers like me. As the name suggests, we had four tracks we could mix once our recordings were finished but we became pretty good at the art of *bouncing* before that.

How did that apply to me? I would start recording a song by using my cheap little *Boss* drum machine to create a rhythm on track one, record a bass part on track two, record my main keyboard part on track three, and then *bounce* all three together on to track four. This would leave me three tracks for me to record a guitar part and lead vocal, that I could then bounce together and put on the empty track three. Following that, I might even bounce all of track four and track three on to track two, leaving me three empty tracks to record yet more instruments and vocals.

Not surprisingly, for some songs, the quality of portastudio demo tapes would become pretty lousy if budding Trevor Horns like me spent too much time in bouncy-bouncy land. Portastudio demos worked best for simple ballads. Perhaps, a piano on track one, a bass guitar on track two, some simple percussion on track three and the lead vocal on track four. If I was feeling adventurous I might try to add a harmony vocal "live" as I mixed it down on to my two-track traditional cassette recorder.

I have, in my loft, a cardboard wine box that once had twelve bottles of plonk in it but which is now home to my portastudio four-track cassettes covering the period from 1983 to 1989. And I still have a portastudio; not the original one which either died or was stolen, (I can't remember) but a cute little machine that still works providing you wiggle the mains lead a little and make it a cup of tea.

In the late summer of 2006 I crawled into my tiny loft, found the box, and found the cassette that was labelled *Criminal Crack - 1988*. I dusted off the portastudio, did the wiggle thing and made it the said cup of tea and had a listen. As I suspected I had gone completely over the top on the bouncing front, but there was one track I thought I could use, and this track had the **magic** for me.

The track contained a wailing meandering guitar part for the verses recorded by my old pal Andy Roberts. It was drenched in reverb and there were a few other things I had mixed in with it, including some strings and

lovely Lindsay Danvers' vocal harmony for the line "I believe in the Holy Spirit!" but I was vaguely hopeful I could pinch the whole thing and spin it into the new version I was building in my computer.

It worked. I had to use my 2006 technology to help me with some time-stretching and pitching issues, but somehow I captured the spirit of of the 1988 version. For my new *Criminal Crack* I then recorded a guide bass guitar part (this never changed in nineteen years) and a guide (programmed) drum part. Together with the Andy/Lindsay portastudio thing I had the perfect foundation on which Tim Stone could build his guitar wall of sound. I quickly recorded a guide lead vocal the evening before he came so he could hear the *gaps* and gave him carte blanche to do what he wanted.

Okay, not quite carte blanche. I sang him the chorus riff I wanted, and played him the main note movement I wanted for the verses. I explained I wanted the verses to have a sort of Bowie *Heroes* type of feel. *Criminal Crack* was the first song Tim recorded for me using electric guitar and he totally blew me away even if he had to use my totally crap electric guitar.

#### **This is how I work with Tim:**

1. I make him an Americano.
2. I play him the song and sing to him or try to play him the ideas I have for the guitar parts.
3. I let him have just one run-through to find his feet.
4. I hit the record button and he records a maximum of five complete versions.
5. We move on to the next song.

We don't always stick to this pattern of course. Sometimes he's having a detox so he doesn't do the Americano thing. And sometimes a song will have a completely different intro, outro, or middle eight that requires a different sound or approach so we will look at that separately. But, by and large, we stick to the tried and tested method above.

Tim is the quickest guitarist I have ever worked with. I don't mean quick as in *moving his hands around the fret board at a million miles an hour* (although he can go as fast as you like, really). I mean quickest in terms of hearing a song, coming up with the part the song really needs, and then nailing it. There have been times where we have got the end of his *run-through* version and he says to me: "Did you get any of that?"

And, hopefully, my answer will be something like: "Yeah, I hit the record button half-way through."

Recording five complete versions of any song the perfect approach in working with Tim. There will almost certainly be a few cracking moments in versions one and two. By versions three and four he will be totally in the groove and it's likely these will give me the most material. As for version five; sure there will be some great bits, although quite often he will over-egg the pudding a little. But hey, Tim's over-eggs can be wonderfully tasty.

Once Tim goes home I listen carefully to everything he has given me. To spin all my favourite parts into the computer, hear what works really well and hear what doesn't quite work so well will take me the best part of two days. And if he's given me some different sounds and textures within the various versions it will mean the two days' work becomes incredibly full-on. Sometimes I feel my head is going to explode.

So it was with *Criminal Crack*. Ignoring the intro, the song has three distinct moods: the verses, the choruses, and the middle eight. And Tim gave me moods for each. Putting them all together was very hard work but I was overjoyed with the final result.

With the guitar parts in the bag, I decided to move on to the drums and moved to Sutton for a day. That's where, in 2006 and 2007, Red Fox lived.

Foxy lives on the edge. From time to time he falls off the edge but, hopefully, somebody catches him. Go to Foxy's place and it's more than likely you'll have to put some money in the meter if you want electricity. Food will be scarce. He might have some tea bags but he probably won't have any milk.

Working with Red Fox is amazing fun and at times his drumming will astonish you. I am not sure where he is at the moment, but if you find him and you need some drum parts from him, this is what you do.

1. Turn up with your equipment, a carton of milk, and some coins for the electricity meter.
2. Accept his offer for a cup of tea and listen to the stories about his life, his ex-wife (it might be ex-wives actually) and his children that he adores.
3. Set up your recording equipment and work out with him, technically, how

you are going to record him. He knows his stuff, so you will come up with a solution together.

4. Once you've sussed this out, and you're all set up, take him out to the nearest greasy spoon and buy him a full English breakfast. Treat yourself to one too.
5. On the way back drop into an off-licence and buy him a four-pack of lager.
6. Once back at his place start work immediately. He will do two to three hours without any problem providing the lager's on hand.
7. Record everything. There will be lots of good stuff, a fair proportion of not so good stuff and occasional brilliant stuff.
8. When he does something brilliant, say on the first chorus of a particular song, don't expect him to repeat it on the second chorus. Whilst he will try, he simply won't remember it, but if you've got the first chorus safely recorded you've got no worries.
9. From time to time he will berate himself because he can't quite nail a particularly complex pattern he wants to do. He might get quite angry. Encourage him to relax, tell him he's doing fantastically, and go with the flow. He'll be fine.
10. At some point, understandably, he will start to tire. From this moment you won't get anything useful recorded so take him to his favourite pub and buy him lunch.
11. He will have a pint of lager finished before you even have time to look at the menu. He will have a pint during his meal, and perhaps another half, but that will usually be enough providing he knows you're going to pop into the off-licence on the way back.
12. Repeat steps 5 to 9.
13. Dismantle your equipment and chat more about whatever you want to chat to him about.
14. You might need to give him a tenner (he will say "lend") for essential supplies.
15. Give him a hug goodbye, tell him to look after himself, and go home.

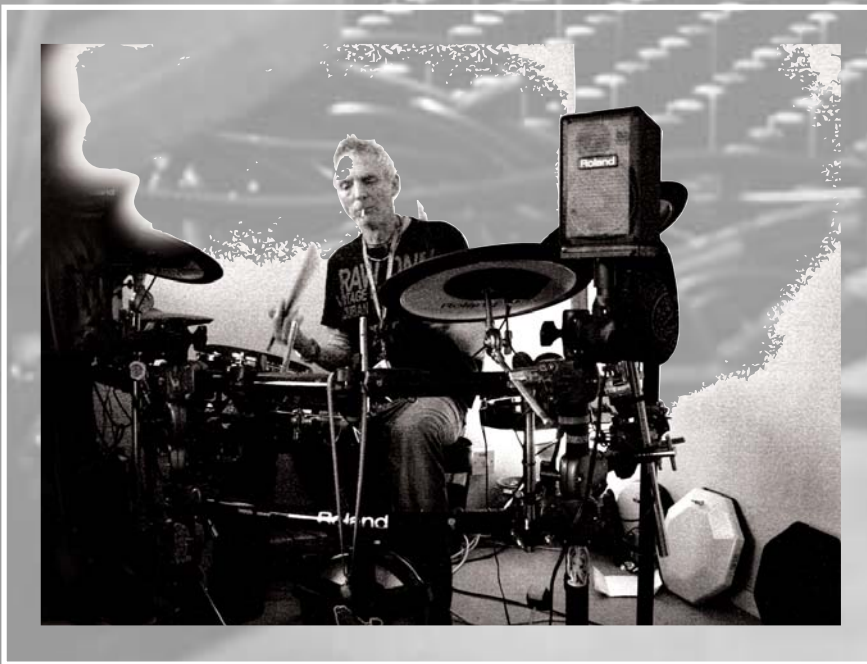
To give Red Fox his due, he had a very difficult job with what I was asking him to do with the various tracks on *Promised Land*. Usually when you record a track with real drums, you start with the drums, the drummer lays the foundation and everyone

else plays on top of that. We were doing it the other way round. Foxy would be played a track which had programmed bass, some programmed keyboards, real guitars, guide lead vocals and a programmed click track playing a bloody loud bleep his headphones.

He had to record his drums on top of all that.

And, finally, to make his job really difficult, I wasn't averse to throwing in an occasional tempo change that, somehow, he had to anticipate and try to speed up or slow down to.

Recording Foxy in his sixth-floor flat in Sutton would not have been possible without the amazing *Roland V-drums*. They are, essentially, a drum kit that you err... plug in. He plays them exactly as he would play a real drum kit. For recording teckies like me they are a God-send because I get all the feel of a real drummer without the hassle of setting up microphones, coping with microphone spillage, neighbours hammering on the walls, and so on.



But there's a downside. The fine details of how I record my drum parts are too complex and boring to explain here. All you need know is that for any one song Red Fox records for me I have about forty-five minutes of drumming I need to listen to really carefully, spin it the bits where he's good or great and then edit this down to the final four or five minutes you hear on the final mix. It's a bloody nightmare.

At least with guitar parts you can hear notes, you can clearly identify the various rhythm and lead parts. But drums? Well... they're

just **drums** aren't they?! Of course, I could tell the difference between, say, a verse pattern and a chorus pattern, but actually spinning them into the track and making them **sit** properly was an arduous task.

That said, it was always worth the effort: Red Fox and I did a cracking job on *Criminal Crack* and after nineteen years of being used to very static, programmed drums for one of my favourite songs, I suddenly had a part that leaped out of the speakers and did the sex, drugs and rock n' roll thing.

With what I would call the difficult parts out of the way I moved on to the fun parts; the easy parts. These included recording the keyboards, half an hour with the most laid-back man in the universe, Davey Cuthbert, getting the bass part down, and recording my lead vocal. It also included recording the rock chicks Aisling, Kat and Sarla on the choruses. Some pages ago I harped on endlessly about wanting the character that *black* voices gave me. For the chorus of *Criminal Crack* I wanted exactly the opposite.

The last thing that remained was to get Kat's screaming vocal solo for the end of the song and the gospel choir. The former requires just a few words: Amazing, breathtaking and wonderfully easy. The latter will require more than a couple of paragraphs me thinks.

I have already mentioned how difficult it was for me to get together nine quality backing vocalists on one day to record my cherished gospel parts. But finally I managed it. Lola Phillips, Alison Thompson and Zara McFarlane were earmarked for the soprano parts, Nana Ya Mensah, Katarina Sandell, and Wayetta B for the alto parts, and

Cecelia Wickham-Anderson, Baby N'Sola and Ulanah Morris for the tenor parts.

I needed the choir for three sections of *Criminal Crack*: the intro, the bridges, and the middle eight. Of these, the intro was the most challenging.

I spent half an hour or so teaching the girls the soprano, alto and tenor parts. All was fine, except Wayetta was running late, very late. When she finally arrived, because she had missed out on most the backing vocal lesson I asked her to sing the lead melody instead.

The girls recorded their parts relatively easily. The most difficult aspect was sorting out technical issues: for example ensuring the various pairs of headphones I had would stretch far enough, and that I achieved the right balance between the sopranos, altos, and tenors. I only have one microphone, so if I got the balance wrong the day I recorded them it would be virtually impossible to correct later on.

*Criminal Crack* took us about an hour to get right and I got 95% of what I wanted. There was just one long holding note, that I couldn't get to work - the one that starts at the end of the intro and holds right through into the start of the first verse. Everyone put plenty of effort into striving for what I wanted, but I simply wasn't hearing what I wanted. So I scrapped that particular approach and Kat came back a week later and sang it as a solo voice. On reflection, I probably should have arranged it like that in the first place - I absolutely love it.

There's only one Fake Lazy Supernova I haven't talked about yet: mix engineer James Loughrey.

or Studio Two at Abbey Road. In my opinion, the best mix engineers will not only sort out all equalisation and compression issues, but also will suggest to producers like me a few ideas for vocal reverbs and guitar delays. And in my opinion, one of the best mix engineers around is James Loughrey.

Mixing *Criminal Crack* was tough going. James did a fantastic job helping to separate all the parts in the mix so that each had their own place, but still sounded part of that overall wall of sound that I had been searching for for so many years.

I had masses of *manual flying in and out* to do as I mixed it, and the only way to try to get this right was to write a prompt sheet: bar 4, push *this* button, mute *that* button, bar 12 drop *this* fader, push *that* reverb, and so on. I must have had about twenty different instructions that continued to the very last bar, at which point I would collapse in a heap, exhausted.

I can remember about two hours into the job, on one version that seemed faultless I got to the penultimate bar and made the

simplest mistake in the world, muting Kat's vocal when I was meant to mute a guitar effect on the channel next door. I stopped the computer with a thump I don't think it appreciated, stared up to the heavens... and screamed.

But I don't give up easily: not after nineteen years, or rather twenty years (I mixed the song at the very end of 2007). An hour or so after my *screaming to the heavens* incident I

got the mix that I wanted, and smiled the broadest of smiles.

Perhaps it wasn't a co-incidence that all my equipment was in the exactly same position as my keyboard, cheap drum machine and microphone all those years ago.

And, finally, I could hear the **magic** I felt the morning I wrote it.



I think I'm a fair record producer, and as a recording engineer I have all the essential skills needed bearing in mind the set-up of my home studio and the equipment I have.

But **mix** engineering is a whole different collection of knobs and faders. In my opinion, the best mix engineers will apply the same level of listening expertise whether you place them in a home studio like mine,

# Picture Book

Like *Criminal Crack*, *Picture Book*, nicknamed *Wolfy* is an old song; it's older than *Criminal Crack* actually, I started it in 1985; the key word here being *started*. What's never changed over the years are the chords and basic feel. But in 1985 it had a very different melody and a completely different set of lyrics.

In the late eighties, the song received a re-working and got another one in the mid nineties. These two versions moved it into the *love story portrayed by children's story-book characters* territory, but even then I didn't have the lyrics quite right. It was just a couplet or two short of the nursery rhyme I wanted.

But I always loved it as pop song, no more and no less, and the chord changes in the middle eight will always have a place in my heart for reasons that I actually struggle to put into words.

In the nineties I made a demo recording of *Wolfy* in my computer that I was pretty pleased with. It had a simple but catchy rhythm guitar part that, I think, I played myself.

I always news I wanted to include *Wolfy* on *Promised Land*. The only two questions in my head were one: would I ever find those missing lyrics that had eluded me for so many years? and two: would I ever find my original guitar parts which I was only 50% sure I had as samples on floppy discs.

I wasn't that worried about the lyrics issue; I knew they would come eventually. As for my guitar parts, yes I found them, one or two were unusable but with a little work I had them, just about, how I wanted them.

When Tim came down I asked him to replace the original part, (not only as a *safety* issue but also because I thought his version would be better than mine.) In fact, what he did wasn't better than my original part, imperfect though it was. There was something about the original part, and perhaps the fact that I had lived with it for over ten years, that meant it was always going to appear on the final mix.

However, because Tim gave *Wolfy* the full Stone treatment meant that I had two or three wonderful guitar parts that could come to the fore especially in the places where my original rhythm part sounded a little fragile.

I recorded *Wolfy* virtually the same way as I recorded *Criminal Crack*. Initially, I got the guide together sorting out my keyboards and original guitar part; then Tim came down to add his magic. Following this I replaced the drums with what Red Fox gave me and finally Davey replaced my guide bass with the real thing. All of this was a little easier than *Criminal Crack*, but it was still a long haul before I had the track ready enough to approach the vocals.

I love playing with words; perhaps in my songs I can be a little too clever for my own good, but all I believe I do is try to find those perfect rhymes and scans that almost make love with the music. With what I will call the bridges in *Wolfy* I had quite a challenge. There were four key issues:

1. The words had to conjure up images of characters from children's picture books.
2. They had to help along the *boy loves girl, but girl no longer loves boy back* story of the song.
3. They needed to scan perfectly with the melody.
4. The last word of each line could not end in a hard consonant; it had to be an open vowel sound to take the backing vocal wash I wanted to soak them with.

The first bridge, the one about dragons and mermaids, I wrote years ago. That one was never in question; it worked beautifully. But bridges two and three had always given me problems. I must have gone through every possible character/rhyming sound combination, (three little pigs, the three bears, you name it!) Finally I cracked it with Pinocchio:

*"Wooden boys with strings should tell the truth now. I told my friends you'll love me come what may. But we don't kiss I say. My nose gets in... gets in the way."*

I fell in love with it instantly and fell around laughing with the nose-growing thing. So two down, one to go. I always thought the last bridge would feature the genie of the lamp and suspected the open vowel would be the "ee" sound. But for weeks and months nothing came to me. Often when I used to drive my car (the radio didn't work) I'd have plenty of time to let words and sounds drift around my head. And one Saturday morning, driving back from Merton Abbey Mills with some shopping I had my epiphany moment.

I guess I was only 95% happy with the "hassle-free" lyric but after years and years

looking for 100%, I took 95% gladly.

*"The genie of the lamp he gives three wishes. I'll make his life straight forward and hassle-free. My wish one two and three are all for you... for you and me."*

The lead vocal was easy for me to record (although the lyrics took me a life-time to write, there are relatively few of them) and the final icing on the cake was to add the backing vocals by Baby, Nanaya and Zara.

I probably will never have enough compliments to pay about these three wonderful singers. Individually they all sing beautifully and their voices are quite different. But whenever they sang for me on *Promised Land* the three voices became one. I could still hear the characters of their individuality but they matched their vibratos and note-endings so perfectly I would always be grinning like the cat that got the cream

The only potentially tricky issue I ever faced in recording Baby, Nanaya and Zara was my usual three voices / one microphone thing. Actually, if I had three good vocal microphones I still think I would have only used one. You never see pictures of the Beach Boys recording on separate microphones do you? They are always crowded around one. Part of the fun for me was getting the balance right as the girls recorded their harmonies, and they always made it easy for me; if, for example, one of them heard herself singing a little louder than the other two, she would ease back a little.

The vocal textures the girls created on *Wolfy* were absolutely perfect and I marvelled at the effort they put in to ensure their harmony blend was faultless. This typified the level of detail they applied to every song on *Promised Land* they sang on.

With the rainbow of vocal colours given to me by the girls, and the free-flowing musicality supplied by Foxy, Tim and Davey, adding a few little events at mix stage was the last thing to do, and provided me with loads of fun.

When I had finished it I knew I had my perfect pop song that I had always wanted.

## Then You're There

Sometimes I dream music or lyrics.

I really do.

And when I do so I am always fascinated as to where the inspiration comes from. I have no idea. All I can say is that sometimes what I dream seems to have real potential, and sometimes it definitely does not! If what I dream has potential I have about twenty seconds to stumble out of bed, switch on whatever recording gizmo is handiest, and sing my ideas into it. If I leave it any longer than this the ideas will be gone forever.

And so it was for *Then You're There*. I remember one evening in October 2006 I was listening to some material from an artist new to me; Richard Hawley. I really liked the *atmosphere* of what he created. I went to bed quite late, but woke very early with a tune and musical feel floating around my head. The twenty second rule had never seemed so relevant but, luckily, I moved fast.

Within about two hours of switching on my equipment I had *Then You're There* just about written. What I came up with felt totally natural and effortless. My worry was that, subconsciously, I had lifted the whole thing from a Richard Hawley song.

Deliberately, I didn't go back to check; (in fact, to this day, I have never checked) it would have upset me so too much to ditch my effort because it was too similar to something that another artist had written. I just thought: "Well if it is, it is!"

I wrote *Then You're There* about my dad who had died seven years previously. The words seemed to tumble from my head to paper as easily as my hands found the chords to support the melody that I had dreamed.



With so many songs on *Promised Land* being old songs, it was refreshing to record something totally new. I knew within an hour or so of completing the song structure that it would feature piano, acoustic guitar, bass, some percussion and little more. So, the first part I recorded was the piano, and in doing so achieved one of those amazing little flukes that typify the way I record my music.

*Then You're There* is quite traditional in structure: intro, verse 1, chorus 1, verse 2, chorus 2, middle 8, chorus 3, outro. Forget the intro, middle 8 and outro for the moment. The verses only have two chords and the choruses have four. There's a key change as you move from the former to the latter that, for me, creates a little picture of beauty.

I decided to try recording a piano *trill* over the verse chords and this trill would consist of three different inversions of the first chord, and one of the second. It was a little tricky but I got there after two or three attempts.

Then I decided I wanted the trill to continue over the chorus structure, and I assumed a five chord trill would work over the four different chords. The problem was because it was in a new key my hands struggled to play the right notes, and my fingers simply couldn't cope with the very last chord.

So, if you listen, it's almost as if you're expecting a fifth trill, but it never sounds, and the notes in the others are almost right, they're not quite. But this *not quite*ness, for me, is completely charming and I knew as soon as I made the mistake I wanted to keep it. So that's what I did - and after that the song was really easy to complete.

A few weeks later Tim recorded a beautiful arpeggio acoustic guitar part for the verses and a driving rhythmical part for the choruses which then doubled up in the middle 8. I added a second acoustic guitar part myself which built gently from the second verse onwards and Davey's bass part underpinned the whole song with subtlety and simplicity.

Recording my lead vocal was easy enough. Interestingly, recording the backing vocals was much trickier, simply because a few of the notes were very high for me.

I managed to pitch the high harmony for the "I so" line after four or five takes, but no matter how many times I tried to sing the same harmony on the "love you" line, I was always flat; probably, due to tiredness. On another day, approaching the line fresh I probably would have got it. But, I really didn't want to wait for another day, so I decided to leave it. What you hear on the final version is a harmony on the first line and a unison on the second. It's another *piano trill* moment - I couldn't imagine it any other way now.

Mixing *Then You're There* was fairly straightforward apart from having to manually drop Tim screaming out "Whoa!" when he played an amazing little guitar run. If you listen carefully, you can just hear it in the last bar of the second verse before the chorus kicks in.

Some of my songs are quite a struggle to write and record. *Then You're There* was the complete opposite notwithstanding the few aforementioned minor tussles that turned out to be minor triumphs. I have so many happy memories of individual moments from the writing and recording process. Perhaps my fondest memory is when I wrote the lyrics of the middle eight. I did this as I was actually recording the lead vocal, and when I wrote the "I'm not here, I'm with you" line at the end, and pitched it perfectly first take I was so happy. It summed up the song perfectly for me.

I think my dad would have been really proud of me at that moment.



# It's Meant For You

I wrote the chords and melody for *It's Meant For You* in 1982. Err... except it wasn't called that then, it was called *Hideaway*. I like to think that by 1981 and 1982 I was starting to write some quite good songs. Musically, I was coming up with some pretty good stuff but, with hindsight, my lyrics were often rather flaky. *Hideaway* fell into that category.

But I never forgot about it. And on October 29th 2006 after meeting somebody at a party I had the inspiration to completely re-write the lyrics. So that's what I did. The melody and the chords remained exactly the same as they had been twenty-four years earlier.

*It's Meant For You* was always going to be a ballad, and the only musicians on the final version are Davey and me. I think the song's a small triumph for me due to the backing vocal arrangement I wrote for the girls and, of course, the way they sang it.

I don't really *score* my backing vocal parts when I write them because my knowledge of music theory is rubbish. I failed grade one piano, don't you know. But I have my own version of notation that works for me; I simply write the notes above the lyrics and colour code them to tell me what timing I am using.

After half a day's work, *It's Meant For You* had become a multi-coloured plethora of notes that was enough to confuse the writer, never mind the singers. But I was really happy with what I had done.

For the verse ("*I so love you*") I had worked out a lead line for the soprano (Zara), with some counter melodies from the alto and female tenor (Nana and Baby, respectively). Underneath these there were more textures from a male tenor and bass, and the timings of these two parts were subtly different from the girls' harmonies. Then, in the chorus, all voices came together (in terms of timing) before going their own ways again on the middle eight.

To ensure the arrangement worked I recorded each part in the song using a string sound from one of my keyboard modules, getting the timing exactly as I wanted it, I did this a few days before the girls came to record their parts and always imagined that I would add the tenor and bass parts myself once the girls had done theirs.

It didn't quite work out like that.

The girls sang their parts wonderfully. That's not to say it didn't take us a while to get there - it did, but they really put heart and soul into the parts I wrote for them. I can hear that every time I listen back to the song now. The problem became that I knew I could never match my tenor and bass parts with what they had done. So, I didn't even try. Instead I simply left the string parts in their place. They're mixed very low, but they're there.

But with the girls' part finished I felt I had a few more backing vocal tricks up my sleeve that I wanted to try out. I came up with a "*time honoured rhymes*" harmony for the middle eight. Then I heard a couple of bars of out-take from Baby and Nana that almost sounded like they were signing backwards. I mixed their voices with mine, and the effect was spell-binding, not for the middle eight necessarily but for the verses. By putting this effect on the left of the mix and the girls' original part on the right I achieved a really interesting beautiful vocal rainbow.

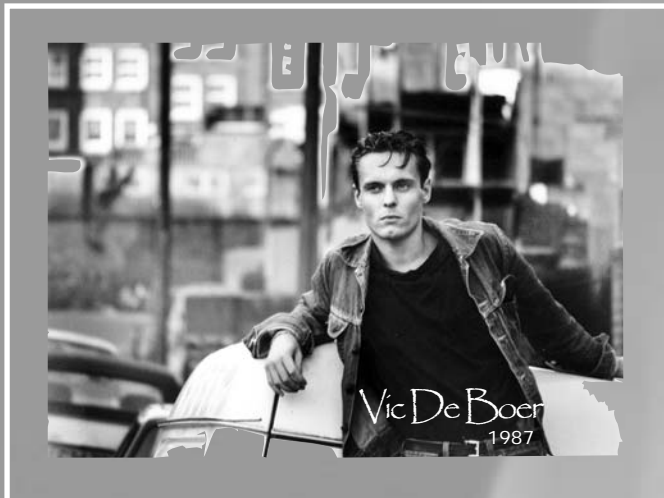
Recording the lead vocal for *It's Meant For You* was tricky. Actually, it wasn't just tricky - it almost killed me. There was one line that should have been so simple but seemed to take me hours and hours, and even then I never really nailed it. But ho hum, that's the way it goes sometimes.

I will be honest: if I want to play four or five tracks from *Promised Land* to brighten up a grey day, *It's Meant For You* is unlikely to be one of them. But once in a while I might play the track, and I always feel a great sense of achievement.



# Golden Boy

We're back in 1987 for this one. *Golden Boy* was always a favourite of mine. I wrote it about Vic, the drummer in my band. He had traded in Sunset Strip in California for a bed-sit with damp on the walls in Hackney.



I'm your bog-standard straight male. If I sing a song with a chorus that goes "You only have to stay with me, my Golden Boy..." I know people are going to think otherwise. This doesn't bother me. I know that the song is merely about a close friendship and a shared hope for a fabulous future. But sometimes, I follow the rules the make life easy for me, rather than complicated, so I decided fairly shortly after I had written the song that the lead vocal should be sung by a girl.

And lovely Vita Karabalina was the perfect choice for the version I wanted to appear on *Promised Land* (I had recorded a demo version in the mid nineties with somebody else singing it.)

There were two main reasons I wanted Vita. The first was that I adore her voice; it so says *summer breeze* to me. The second was that she was one of the few vocalists I was working with at the time who was totally at home with *Golden Boy's* key, E flat. For a reason I will explain in the next paragraph, this could never change and girls who didn't have a naturally high register could never really embrace the melody.

Recording the instruments for *Golden Boy* was very hard work. It's often the way with my old songs where I am pinching guitar samples and other events from years gone by. My foundation for *Golden Boy* was a delicious little guitar hook recorded by my old pal Sean Anderson in, err... ninety ninety

something. He'd also recorded some groovy wah-wah stuff. Most of it was usable, and the reason why the song had to stay in E flat.

If ever a song was painted by numbers it was this one. Let me try to explain. You decide to paint a picture of... I don't know... a beach scene. You have a blue sea, a golden beach, and a bright yellow sun and you're happy with these. You paint a beach hut. It has red and green stripes. You like the green but you're not sure about the red, so you darken it a little. You love it!

Then you add some deckchairs and a child with an ice cream. But now the green stripes on the beach hut are getting on your nerves. So you darken them a little. It's okay, but now the red doesn't look so good. You keep mucking around with these too colours and finally you get the balance right.

Then, a week later, you look at the picture and you decide to see what it looks like with no beach hut whatsoever. So you take it out completely. "Ah... that's better," you say, "but I'm not quite sure about the colours of those bloody deckchairs..."

You get the picture.

I need to say that I am totally happy with what I ended up with on *Golden Boy*, but it took me forever to get there; so many colours were added, deleted, and then added again. In fact, it was never my intention that the people should be able picking out individual colours within the main rhythm of *Golden Boy*, as long as the overall mish-mash worked. And I believe it does.

And there are many up-front moments of course: in particular I love Foxy's drumming and Tim's Spanish guitar parts, and I adore Vita's vocal (even if it took us a while to get there).

And I guess I need to explain a little about the long introduction, narrated beautifully by eight year old Ruth Brotherton. Well, maybe I don't need to explain a little about it - the story's right there!

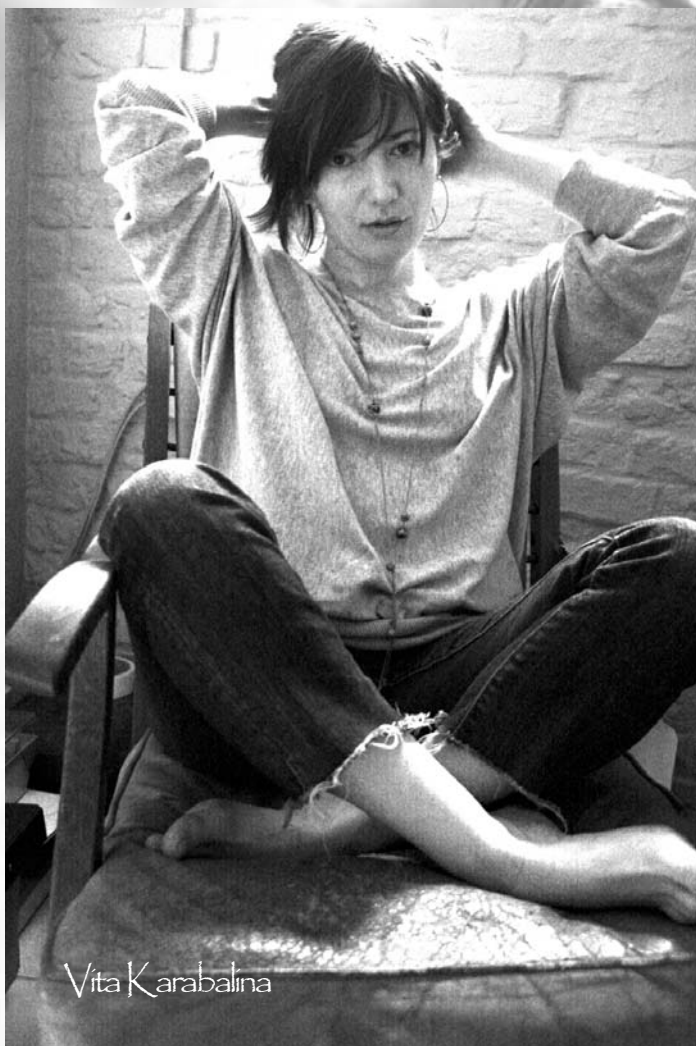
The simple fact is I had spent an age getting together a fabulous little rock n' roll number called *Little Bits Of Heaven*. I was then denied the opportunity to put it on my album due to an intransigent git working at an enormous American publishing company threatening to pursue me for zillions of dollars when I asked for permission to use a melody from an obscure 1957 do-wop track

by the Platters. The situation annoyed me so much I had to do something to get my own back.

Don't get me wrong. I have no illusions of said git listening to *Golden Boy* thinking... "Wow, that clever English guy sure showed me up!" but what I wanted to do was at least hint on my album what a deliciously cheeky rock n' roll snack I had come up with. There's no note of the melody, so I can't be sued for zillions, but at least you can hear a really tasty little backing vocal arrangement and Red Fox's wonderfully wacky drumming.

And yes, I know for some people this introduction rather breaks up my album with a few totally unnecessary minutes that take us from *The Wizard Of Oz* to *The Rocky Horror Show* and back again. They're probably right actually, but given the choice now of leaving it on, or taking it off?

... I'd leave it on.



Vita Karabalina

## I Only Have One Note

If you were to send me to a desert island, and tell me there was just one song I could take from *Promised Land* I would take *I Only Have One Note*. I think it's because this song represents pure joy to me for so many reasons.

Let's get the only non-joyful moment out the way first: recording the drums. *I Only Have One Note* was one of the last songs to be wrapped up, and by that time Red Fox had gone awol. So, I asked Mike Searl (whom I had met through the various jazz jam sessions) to help out. Mike was great, and his playing was spot on. The problem was purely technical.

I hired a recording studio in Fulham. As I suspected, because we used real drums miked up in the traditional way I had various spillage issues. The house engineer spent ages trying to sort them out for me, but in the end I had to say to him: "Look, don't worry, let's go for what we've got, and I'm sure I will be able to make it work somehow." So Mike recorded his three or four takes and I just hoped I could sort it out at home. Thankfully, I managed to do exactly that, but it was seriously hard work.

Okay, so now let's talk about the pure joy.

I wrote *I Only Have One Note* in August 2006 at a time when I was totally invigorated by my work with the two gospel choirs. I was getting ready to go out one evening to a party and felt happy, a little buoyed up, and totally at ease with my life. I had two hours left before I needed to leave, so I sat down at the piano and started to write.

The first verse tells it exactly how it was. My old friend Graham Lipscomb and I wrote a song together in 1979 called *Lonely Once*. It wasn't anything wonderfully special (due largely to my rather mundane lyrics) but one of Graham's chord sequences totally stole my heart and knowing that he wouldn't sue for zillions (maybe, just a pint of Guinness) I coolly lifted it from 1979 and placed it in 2006.

I completed my first verse in twenty minutes or so. Then I changed the key, put my foot on the tempo pedal

and moved the song into gospel land. The first part of the chorus didn't need many lyrics, and its melody didn't need many notes. In fact it only needed one. Things could take off once I hit the second part and brought the choir in.

I suppose I had the basic song more or less sketched out by the end of that two-hour writing session but over the next week or so I worked more on the arrangement, trying to figure out how I could make the various key changes work. I decided the second verse should drop down in tempo to be the same as the first, and I completed its lyrics as well as the music and lyrics of the middle eight. Deliberately, I lifted the latter from *Kooky Hooky Floosie* from *Like The Young And Brave Do*.

Recording the instruments for *I Only Have One Note* was loads of fun, and recording the choir was a blast. It was one of those occasions where I kept saying to the girls: "Bigger, bigger, make it bigger!!" And boy, they didn't disappoint me.

The final hurrah moment was writing and recording the outro - this happened quite a time after writing the main part of the song. To be direct about it: I had just been dumped (by text). I was feeling a little bit bruised, but a little bit *Well... your loss girl*. Before I knew it a rather bit-tersweet outpouring just kind of *happened*. "Don't worry about me, I've got a broad back..."

I was thrilled with the words I wrote and the scatty way I delivered them but the key for me would be getting Baby, Nana and Zara to match me word for word with a three part harmony I wrote for them. When I played them the idea they had a collective look that said: *What? Are you crazy?!* But I could tell they were totally up for the challenge.

It took half an hour or so, but the pure joy we all felt when they banged in perfect take after perfect take was palpable. And what are my other moments of pure joy? There are so many. Perhaps it's easiest if I make a

list of my top ten, in no particular order:

1. The rich vocal reverb James and I found for the verses.
2. My organ solo; in particular the very end run and the way Davey's bass follows it.
3. The sound we got for Tim's guitar part on the verses.
4. The complete hugeness of the choir on the middle eight.
5. That little vocal "ah" noise I make before singing "Love should fill my heart."
6. The memories of writing the lyrics of the second verse; what and who they're about.
7. Mike's hi-hat pattern.
8. Zara's amazing high note on the last chorus (left hand speaker!)
9. The outro, again.



10. And again.

So there we are. Pure joy to me and if any of it bounces back your way, I'm even happier.

# There But For The Grace of God Go I

I always thought I could write a hymn, or something near to a hymn and that was a driving factor behind coming up with *There But For The Grace Of God Go I*.

My memory is hazy as to when I actually wrote the song. My lyric book tells me much of it was written in July and November 2003 but something tells me it was a song that took a couple of years to finally get right. What I do know is that many of the lyrics describe some difficult times of my life.

You can hear that's there's very little in terms of instrumentation; just an electric piano, a real piano and bass. So between Davey and me that accounted no more than a day's work. That was a good job really, because the lead vocal seemed to take me a year to get right.

You might have spotted a pattern emerging. Recording lead vocals for the ballads was so much more challenging to me than singing the up-tempo numbers. It's not surprising really. I am not the greatest singer in the world, and on a track like *There But For The Grace Of God Go I* there's no where to hide; no boom-boom drums or wailing guitars to disguise any vocal imperfections.

And I **am** a perfectionist.

Well, to a point. If I am convinced I can do something better than what I have done already, I will work my butt off until I get what I want. I can safely say that with *There But For The Grace Of God Go I*, I worked my butt off; it was the most difficult song on the whole album to sing. But finally, I had a lead vocal where I knew I could do no better.

My original plan for *There But For The Grace Of God Go I* was to have the choir providing a backing vocal wash through the middle eight and in the last verse. But having written the part I handed it over to Baby, Nana and Zara to see what they would make of it before I made my final decision.

I think it was their finest contribution on the whole album. Their control on that long "say" note was outstanding and their complete performance took the song to a whole new place.

These days, I don't listen back to *There But*

*For The Grace Of God Go I* very much but whenever I do, I'm pretty proud of what I think is a really pretty and very heart-felt song.

## "Never"

"Never" comes from the late eighties vintage so often referred to in this account - it was the last of the bunch actually, written in 1988. It always felt a very special song to me, and there's a certain vulnerability about the lyrics that seemed to sum up my life at the time I wrote it.

Like *Criminal Crack*, *Golden Boy*, and *Now and Again*, "Never" was demoed plenty of times between the time I wrote it, and the time I made the recording that ended up on *Promised Land*. But unlike the others in that time it went through all sorts of tempo and feel changes, and one version I have features a lead vocal by my old friend Rebecca Leigh-White, who sang with me on the *Like Young And Brave Do* album.

For reasons I can't really explain I decided I wanted some children's voices singing a haunting three-note melody on the verses. It certainly had something to do with the fact that in 1987 and 1988 an album that never strayed far from my CD player was *The Colour Of Spring* by Talk Talk. It's a beautiful album, and they use the children's voices effect on a couple of tracks.

To get my children's voices I dropped a line to the head teacher of the primary school at the top of my street asking her for the favour. She rang me back saying it would be no problem at all. So, I popped up there a week later, tape recorder in hand, and was ushered into a class of excitable eight year olds. The recordings I got were exactly what I wanted. Most of the kids could sing the notes I asked them to sing, but because quite a few couldn't this added to the charm.

I used these recordings on my main demo of "Never" that I recorded in the early nineties. My biggest concern as I started to record the version for *Promised Land* some sixteen years later was whether or not I would be able to find those original recordings.

These days, whenever I get a one-off take of something utterly unique (perhaps a drum fill, a lead guitar noise, or a vocal effect) I make a digital back up, perhaps even two, in case the original becomes corrupted. In the early nineties I wasn't quite so disciplined. One grey winter's day in February 2007 I

spent five or six hours searching through every old floppy disc and digital audio tape I had, but all to no avail. The kids had long since grown up and left school.

The only solution was to find myself a new bunch of children. And what's the use of being in your mid forties if you can't call on a few of your mates to bring their little ones around, let me bribe them with cakes and fizzy drinks, and then shove a microphone in their faces?



I only had eight children as opposed to about twenty-eight at the school, but the percentage that couldn't sing very well was the same - about 20%. (Not surprising really.) But with only eight children in a small recording space the dynamics become more critical and, for the new version, I had to make swift decision concerning the desperately out of tune Emil. I used the *You Come And Help Press The (completely irrelevant) Button On The Mixing Desk Whilst Wearing These Huge Headphones* trick.

Luckily, he fell for it.

With the kids' part in the bag, the rest of the song was pretty plain sailing. Actually that's a complete lie; it was bloody hard work, not helped by the fact that I decided to write a brand new intro and outro that took the total length to almost seven minutes of pure self-indulgence.

But I always knew I was going to put "Never" towards the back end of the album and if there is a place for self-indulgence, in my

book, that's where it should be.

I spent days and weeks crafting the various effects and guitar noises from previous versions with the new effects and guitar noises from 2007. Yes, sometimes it really felt like hard work, but it was always a labour of love; I was thrilled with what I ended up with eventually.

As for the mix; like *Criminal Crack*, I needed the patience of a saint particularly because I was using a random echo effect over the drums. Sometimes it would kick in and sound absolutely amazing and at other times it would sound completely over the top. I had no control of it.

In the end I realised, because of this lack of control, the chances of achieving an absolutely perfect mix were practically non-existent. The solution was to ask mastering engineer Richard Jackson to splice together my three favourite sections from three different mixes at the mastering stage.

Actually, I suppose you can't really *splice* in a computer, but you know what I mean.

## I Don't Need That Kind Of Rhythm For My Blues

I like to think I'm quite smart when it comes to analysing musical and lyrical structures from the world of pop, soul and rock n' roll. But I'm not really. This is borne out by the fact that I was at least forty years old before I realised the trick of writing a blues song. So here it is, explained to you bitter and twisted *bluesmen* out there. (Sorry ladies, you may also be bitter and twisted, but it's one of those rules that's universally accepted: *girls don't write the blues.*)

Write the first line... something on the lines of your life is complete garbage and you're as miserable as sin. You're playing a sad and

lonely blues riff around Emajor for four bars on your beaten up old guitar. The melody for your second line is exactly the same, as are the lyrics, but change the riff to to A7 for two bars and then go back to E for two. Then, you come to the third line, where the chords move to B7 for two chords before resolving themselves to E again. And, crucially, this is where the lyrics change: something like the reason **why** your life's garbage and you're as miserable as sin is because your woman's run off with a second-hand car salesman.

There you go, you're on your way.

So, I'll be honest: the main reason why I wrote *I Don't Need That Kind Of Rhythm For My Blues* was because, lyrically, I thought could knock spots off most blues songs written since the 1950s. This may seem a smug boast from a completely unknown, unsuccessful song-writer. But I don't care. Every time I hear my lyrics to this song I think they're not brilliant, witty and catchy.

Since I was a young child, I have always been able to write words that rhyme and scan. As I got older my efforts got better. Sometimes I could knock off a poem or song in a matter of hours. And sometimes it would take days or even weeks.

But with *I Don't Need That Kind Of Rhythm For My Blues* it took months... spread over a number of years. The first entry in my lyric book is July 2001. The next is August of the same year before a pause until January 2002. We then wait a year until April 2003. Finally, I move into serious *Let's Finish This Bloody Song* mode a staggering three and a half years later in August 2006.

The reason was fairly simple. It's not because I was being lazy. With my blues song I was striving for great rhymes and perfect scanning, with dashes of sublime alliteration from time to time (*Thank goodness for the goodness of the greens!*) And if I needed to be bloody clever with a few of the rhymes then I would be. (*Sex is fine with exes for a while.*)

So, as I was writing the song (over the years) I was striving for this alliteration and cleverness. But more than this, I was striving to develop a **story**. In 2001, 2002 and 2003, I had many of the rhyming couplets, and the *characters* of the song (Stevie, Marvin, the crazy hound, the cat that wants the cream and so on) but I still didn't have the hook; namely **she's** walked out on him with his precious old guitar, but **he's** still got her cherished dancing shoes.

That part came in 2006.

So you won't be surprised to know that the hardest part of creating *I Don't Need That Kind Of Rhythm For My Blues* was actually writing it. Once I had that cracked, and had recorded Foxy's amazing drum part at his flat in Sutton, the rest was a breeze.

One of my clearest memories of recording this song was my work with Tim. This was the first time he actually played on one of my songs. I often like flipping the guitar thing on its head a little. If a track is ballady and gentle, rather than play a melodic acoustic part, I will ask Tim to come up with something heavy and distorted. And if it's a rocky kind of number I might ask him to come up with something fairly understated on the acoustic. And so it was with *I Don't Need That Kind Of Rhythm For My Blues*. I threw him my acoustic guitar, but Tim being Tim, he was never going to do something *understated*, well not a song like that one. What he played totally blew me away.



The rest of the song was all pretty straightforward: I added a rhythm electric guitar part myself, Davey ticked the correct rock 'n' roll boxes with his bass part, and I found a rather cheeky, rather cheesy brass sample in one of my keyboard modules that worked a treat for the choruses.

Recording the backing vocals was hard work. I did them all myself, and I had tremendous fun doing so, especially with the bass voice. But the song has **different** backing vocal parts for every single verse and chorus. So perhaps I should qualify the *tremendous fun* statement. At 10.30am it was. By 5.30pm I was simply aching to get it finished.

But eventually I had the backing vocals perfect. All that remained was to have a little fun just before I mixed it, and a little fun I certainly had with the help of Hannah, Collette and my ansaphone.

I know I am not your traditional blues man but *I Don't Need That Kind Of Rhythm For My Blues* is my kind of blues and I love it.

## Take Your Time

This is another song where the two principle elements (its music and lyrics) represent two totally different parts of my life. In that respect it's identical to *It's Meant For You*. I wrote the chords and melody in 1986. The words I set to the music at the time weren't my best. They almost worked, but not quite. The song was called *Count The Stars*.

It was one of those songs I put at the bottom of my magic box and promised myself I would come back to it one day. Like the *Hideaway/It's Meant For You* story I had no demo versions to refer back to or pinch little bits from. But I didn't need any. The chords had stayed in my head for twenty years. The verse and chorus were always going to be easy enough to pick out on the piano, and as long as I could work out the beautiful bridge sections I knew I'd have no worries.

It took me a little time, but I worked them out.

I always felt that my new recording would be very simple; keyboards, bass and guitar, but there was no point even starting it until I had a new set of lyrics.

The inspiration popped into my life in 2006 and the words came together on a late night and early morning shift on the 13th and 14th February 2007.

I love the words; I really do. They weren't the easiest in the world to write actually. The chorus was particularly tricky because the nature of my 1996 melody gave me very little room of manoeuvre with the way I worked my rhymes and scans. It was for that specific reason that my original version never worked very well.

With the new words written, *Take Your Time* followed the usual ballad recording pattern; namely, instruments: easy, lead vocal: difficult. Using my customary *guitar flip trick* mentioned previously Tim recorded me a distorted but melodic lead guitar part that I felt would become the most identifiable instrumental hook of the song; that or what I call the *Russian bell thing*. In fact, for me, neither is my **favourite** part of the song - what I love best, is Davey's bass sound.

David is such an amazing bass player, and such a lovely relaxed laid-back kind of guy. Recording with him is always an absolute pleasure. We did the whole of *Promised Land* in just four sessions, three songs in each session. I'm not quite sure what we did with the bass sound we used on *Take Your Time*; maybe I put it through a little box I hadn't tried putting it through before.



All I know is that whatever we did we came up with a depth of sound that I had never experienced before. That depth of sound, coupled with the beautiful simplicity of the part itself puts a huge smile on my face.

There's not a lot more to say about *Take Your Time*, except I really love what I did with the outro. I took a few vocal out-takes by Vita on *Golden Boy* when she was whispering the words "We'll go on and on for all time" (in preparation for singing the line properly)... and coolly dropped them on top of the Russian bells to see how they landed.

They landed pretty perfectly I think.

# Time, I Suppose, For Sex

Although this track is *Promised Land's* opener there are two main reasons why I've put its story so late down the list:

1. I wrote and recorded it as the album was nearing its completion (July 2007)
2. It's the only track on the album where I am not totally satisfied with what I have ended up with.

Let's start by saying what I really like about the song, because there's lots.

As a pop song, I think it's great. I had this wacky lyrical idea to write some words about a smug songwriter who meets a beautiful babe and invites her back to his flat (that doubles as his recording studio). She's dying to rip his clothes off and get him into bed but, idiot that he is, all he goes on about is his studio, his funky new song, and the fact that he's come up with an amazing chorus. And he's smug enough to think that after all that she will still be into him.

And that there'll be time, he supposes, for sex.

The song was great fun to write and I love the chord changes and chorus melody, and in particular the way the chorus really lifts. Tim's guitar playing is great, and the girls' backing vocals are sublime. When Kat recorded her vocal solo I felt I should have set up my microphone two streets round the corner, such as her amazing power, and hey, I even like my lead vocal.

So why do I feel slightly dissatisfied?

It's the groove - I simply didn't nail what I really wanted.

Occasionally when I write a song I don't start with some chords, a melody or some lyrics. I start with a groove and, almost inevitably, this will be a groove I hear on another record that I want to replicate. There are no copyright issues here. I suppose you could get into trouble if you copied a bass line note for note, but a groove's a groove, especially if it's just drums. Once you put your own chords, melody and lyrics on top of it, it becomes your song.

I have a version of Eddie Kendricks' 1973 hit *Keep On Truckin'* where there are eight bars of totally sublime groove that comes in at

about twenty seconds. It comes after the intro, but before the you hear the vocal. Interestingly, on the version I have, the rest of the song never quite lives up to the groove he sets up in those eight bars, but if ever there were eight bars to excite me enough to write a song it's those.

Eddie Kendricks was a fairly major player in the golden era of Motown, as far as I believe. For quite a while he was lead singer in The Temptations. The playing on loads of the Motown records is to die for, and *Keep on Truckin'* is one of the best.

I must have listened to those eight bars for hours and hours on end trying to work out just how they made the groove so gloriously effortless. I even sampled the eight bars and spun them into my computer and then added my own drums and bass on top to see if I could replicate it. It took me a day or so, but once I thought I had matched it as near as damn it, I deleted Eddie's eight bars and listened to my version solo.

My version wasn't bad but, of course, it was built on programmed drums and bass, rather than proper instruments and playing. I wasn't over-concerned because my intention was always to get Red Fox and Davey to give me the real thing and then, with a fair following wind, recreate that slightly muffled, muddy, atmospheric, 1973 funk vibe at the mix stage.

With what I had created with my programmed drums and bass I had enough to write the song itself and record all the guitars, keyboards and vocals. So that's what I did.

But no matter how many times I kept on truckin' round to Sutton, or phoning him on his mobile the elusive Red Fox had gone underground. I toyed with the idea of asking Mike again and hiring the studio in Fulham, but bearing in mind the technical issues I had with recording *I Only Have One Note*, I really didn't want to go down that route.

By late autumn of 2007 I had to make a decision, or run the risk of never getting *Time, I Suppose, For Sex* finished.

Something told me pursuing Red Fox was now a complete waste of time, so I called Mike and asked him to bring his snare drum around to the flat. I wanted to see how we could mix and match the best of my programmed stuff with the best of what Mike could give me live. And that's what you hear on the final record.

I thought it was okay at the time, but with the best will in the world, it's a country mile from the groove those Motown boys got going on *Keep On Truckin'*. Earlier on I called their groove *effortless*. Mine's rather wooden and a little jerky and perhaps sounds like a real **effort**. The song doesn't suffer unnecessarily from this, it's just not what I dreamed of when I wrote it.

C'est la vie.

## Now And Again

I first started writing songs when I was sixteen. They were pretty lousy. At seventeen there was some improvement but not much. Songs for me always had to have interesting chord structures; the melodies were less important. That's not to say I wrote particularly interesting chord structures, but I tried hard. And there was one chord movement I found when I was seventeen that totally transfixed me. I played it for hours and hours on end.

I know my fair share of chords, but I don't know the names of the complicated ones. If you have a piano nearby, wander over, and put your right hand on **these** notes. Your thumb presses middle C, and above that your fingers press E, G, A and the C an octave up. It's a C6 chord.

Okay, so keep your hand in exactly that shape but move it up so that your thumb plays the E above middle C, and then up again so it plays the A, and then back down to the E. Whilst that's all your right hand does for three or four minutes, your left hand moves from a C to an A, to a C again, and then to an F. Sorry, I don't think I've got the patience to try to explain how long the left hand waits on each note before moving.

But just listen to Now And Again and you'll hear it.

When I came up with this chord movement in err... 1979 I did attempt to write a melody and some words to go on top, but they were pretty dreadful. In 1987 I decided to have another go and I wrote the melody and lyrics that turned my chord movement into a song called *Now And Again*.

And if you've stuck with this account this far, you might guess because the song is from my 1987 vintage, there will have been several demo versions of it over the next twenty years.

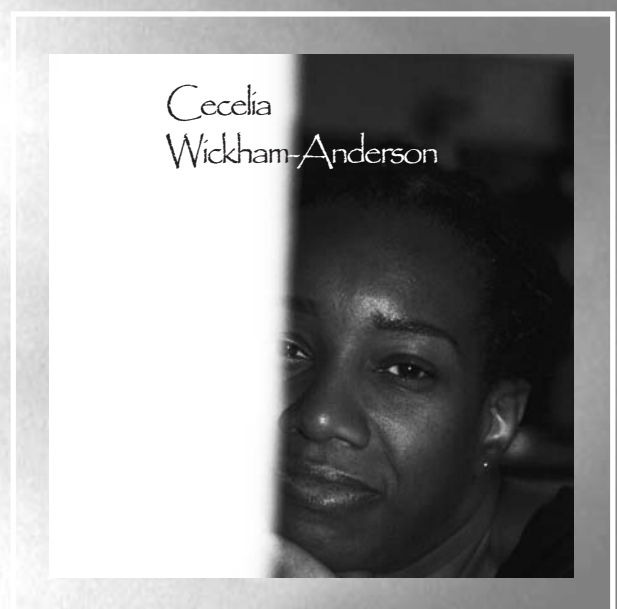
You guess right.

The song always retained its chord structure and melody but I experimented with a few different grooves over the years. The one I liked best was had a military kind of feel not a million miles away from what you hear on Ravel's *Bolero*. For my new version, Red Fox came over to the flat with his snare drum and gave me exactly what Doctor Ravel ordered.

The only other thing I pinched from an old version was that haunting vocal cry just before the middle instrumental section. I think it's my friend Alison Mass, who I haven't seen for years, and I think it's from 1990. I thought I might have another kids' "Never" moment and not find the sample, but, luckily, I found a dusty looking floppy disc which looked promising. Lo and behold, the sample loaded without any problems. If it had gone corrupt over the years, I wouldn't have tried to recreate it, asking one of my current singers to sing it for me. It was either that one, or nothing.

With Foxy's drum part safely recorded, the rest of the song came together pretty easily really. Davey's bass part added the colour that only a real bass player can (all my demo versions of the song used a programmed bass) and I was particularly pleased with the rhythm acoustic guitar part that I played myself.

Cecelia Wickham-Anderson is a lovely person. With her husband Colin, she leads the Vox Simba choir that became such an important part of my life in the summer of 2006. She sang beautifully on *Now And Again* and the goose bumps I got when she first sang me that gorgeous opening note at the beginning of verse three, I still get when I listen to the track today.



As for my vocal, while I knew the last verse was at the very top of my vocal range, it was actually easier to sing than the lower, more gentle verses. It was simply a case shutting my eyes and blasting it out at maximum volume. When I do that, I will only have two or three takes in me before I collapse exhausted, but if memory serves me correctly, I got it first take.

I love the outro to *Now And Again*. My friend Marvel sings the first backing vocal part, then Baby, Nana and Zara come in singing that spread harmony, and finally Kat adds her adlibs, almost *answering* what Cecelia sings. It's hard to explain. It's almost as if they're running the end credits on a movie; the movie of course being my album that's finally reaching its end after two and a half years in the making.

And the *Happy Mouse* bit?

I had another one of my dreams; it's no more or than that. Quite literally, I dreamed the first three lines of lyrics. Dreams I never understand; I never do. Why on earth did I dream about a mouse not hitting the concrete hard, only to be barred from entering his new country by a rather over-zealous border control monkey?

But having dreamed three such delightful lines and scribbling them down before I forgot them, I thought the least I could do was give *Happy Mouse* a happy ending. So that's what I did. I wrote another verse, and then popped down to my sister's house in Horsham a few days later to ask my five year-old nephew Dominic to sing it for me. I needed to help a little with a version I recorded on my dictaphone, but he did a pretty spot-on job, I reckon.



**And finally...**

Although *Now And Again* was the perfect album closer, I decided it was the perfect first song to mix. James and I spent the best part of a day on it in November 2007. The last song we mixed was *Golden Boy* which we completed in mid April 2008. After this I had a few production mixes to sort out for promos and my website.

And then I was finished.

I can remember taking a photo of myself with a big stupid grin on my face holding up a sign that said: *Done and Dusted, 20th April 2008*.

When I started this account, I really hoped it wouldn't drag on for pages and pages. I am afraid that it has. If you have stuck with it this far, thank you, and bloody well done.

It's fair to say that with *Promised Land* I fulfilled my ambition of making that album that I always wanted to make. But that's not to say it was easy ride. What this account hasn't referred to at all was time I spent marketing it, and the time I spent sorting out legal and administrative issues that under-pinned its release.

I am sure you have seen that programme on Channel 4 called *Grand Designs*. They start almost every show with a dreamy-eyed couple drooling over their architect's plans of their new home, and what they think is a realistic budget and timescale for completing the build. Then, for reasons they could have never have expected, the budget and timescale start slipping out of control. This sums up *Promised Land* perfectly.

Part of my problem was that I was trying to make my new album while starting my journey into self-employment. My discipline was lousy. There was one piece of work I can remember that paid me well enough but was dreadfully dull. There were so many times that I would fully intend to put in a shift, but ended up saying: "Sod it, let's do some more of the album instead."

This kind of approach was only ever going to end up with one result: I was going to run out of money.

And so it came to pass. By the summer of 2007 after a year's worth of work on the album, interrupted rather rudely from time to time by bits and pieces of paid work, I was totally broke with the overdraft at its limit.

Luckily, fortune smiled on me a little. For the previous eight years I had been putting £130 a month away into a ten-year savings plan. I never really looked to see what it was worth because I didn't think I could touch it until the ten years were up. I phoned up the company who organised it for me on the off-chance I could access the money and got a rather pleasant surprise. Because I had passed the eight year point I could take the money my investment had made early, provided I paid a small one-off fee. The return I was looking at was pretty impressive and the one-off fee was miniscule in comparison.

So I took the money and ran.

As I said, fortune smiled on me. About two weeks later the UK was hit by the credit crunch and the stock-market went into free-fall. I didn't care a damn.

It wasn't an enormous amount of money but it was big enough; the sort of money I could buy a pretty good car with or use it to treat myself to a round the world cruise. I did neither. I cleared my overdraft, had a bloody good shop up at Sainsbury's and ploughed the rest of it into my album. Actually, let me qualify that a little: I put the majority of it into my day-to-day living expenses for the next year while I finished the album.

And even then, it wasn't enough.

In true *Grand Designs* spirit, new costs kept appearing, and the album's release date kept being pushed back. But finally I got there, and on 8th September, 2008 *Promised Land* said hello to the world and then waited nervously to see if the world would say hello back.

Truth is, it's still waiting.

