

Memoirs of a reluctant worship-leader

My prolonged relationship with the guitar began on the day in 1960 when I first felt shivers down my spine as Hank Marvin played *Apache* on the Light Programme. I started banging out the tune on our old piano with half the notes missing, in preparation for forming my own guitar group. That idea was quickly shelved when a Fender guitar, just like Hank's, appeared in our local music shop with a tag saying "160 gns". The financial position was just as hopeless at the nearby junk shop, where a secondhand Spanish guitar was on sale for £4.10.0 — a fortune.

So instead I went through grammar school being "classically trained" to play tunes like A Little Mazurka (known to us as "a Little Berserker") on the violin. The violin was a funny, squeaky, instrument which cracked when you dropped it from under your chin. If you tried to play *Apache* it always sounded like the theme to "Juke-Box Jury" and you got sticky rosin on your fingers. But you could do a realistic imitation of a passing police car to liven up orchestra rehearsals. In the end it gave me up.

By now I had become a Christian, and my friend Murray and I went on a church-crawl of the town, avoiding those where the leader sang "Hallelujah" at random during choruses, and ending up at the Congregational church where everyone else in the youth club seemed to play guitar. By "play", I mean they could pick out the bass line to *Spoonful* which, as retired hippies will remember, consisted of only two notes, repeated for a quarter of an hour. Once again I was caught up by the creative possibilities of the instrument. Or rather, I realised that it was a good means of attracting the attention of the girls at the club, whom Murray referred to disparagingly as "decrepit females". But then he already played guitar.

Consequently I procured a pine-smelling Czechoslovakian guitar for my 17th birthday, and quickly learned the three chords necessary to blow the *Spoonful* brigade off the scene. Ignoring the painful grooves in my fingertips, and clutching my passport to social happiness in its cardboard box, I casually strolled into the youth club that Friday. Only to find that all the girls had also taken up guitar, and were huddled in the opposite corner having a Kum-ba-Ya convention. Funny old life, isn't it?

So I channelled my teenage angst into learning to play ragtime and blues and trying to sound like not only Peter and Paul, but Mary as well, since everybody else was still buzzing away at *Spoonful* and wouldn't join in.

You will see that playing worship music was never a strong motivation. That was because, in those days, you had to choose between *Youth Praise*, which was doctrinally sound but dire, and *Faith, Folk and Charity*, which though musically tolerable was all about Vietnam and Biafra, rather than Jesus. Cliff Richard was just an old pop singer, and there was no such thing as Graham Kendrick. But all that was to change!

Next: I meet Graham Kendrick, and get to hold Cliff Richard's dog.

I was in a spiritually low state when I went to off to university in 1970. I almost always seemed to be in one in those days - in this case it was probably a combination of decrepit female trouble and the prospect of another six years at school. I sought solace in acoustic blues, practising endlessly whilst others were earning rowing blues, which accounts for my physical condition now. I formed an acoustic trio, which rapidly shrank to a duo when the other guitarist heard me play violin (are you out there Andy? I've given up now, honest!). *Mangling Dun* would have done even better if we had stuck to our intention to rehearse before gigs, rather than during the interval. But Brenda Armstrong, the singer, had a wonderful voice, and always produced rapturous applause even when we forgot the words.

I ended up running the Cambridge University folk club, overseeing the decline of the Red Cow from being the hottest of pub venues to a dog's toilet. The folk-clubs taught me that music is there to be performed to people; an invaluable lesson for worship-leaders. However, worship wasn't very close to my heart that first year. But in the summer, an old Crusader friend asked me to play in a coffee bar he was running in Minehead. It ended up as a refuge for shell-shocked Butlins staff.

But for me, it gave God's Spirit an opportunity to open my heart and fill me. This was not a conscious process, as we worked too hard to think. We were up early to pray, wrote in the morning, rehearsed in the afternoon, played all evening and collapsed into bed at 2am. But I discovered to my surprise, having arrived quite lukewarm towards God, that I left on fire for him. The Bible had come alive and an endless stream of Christian

songs found their way into my guitar. That's why I believe in God's undeserved grace. It made up for the quality of the music.

Back home, I discovered that the local Baptists were holding a rock festival, and somehow managed to muscle in on it. That's how I found myself on the same bill as John Russell (later to have a US Top Thirty hit with the band *After the Fire*), a young student called Graham Kendrick (the only other Christian I'd met who used flashy open tunings on his guitar), a loony named Ishmael (one half of the most inept yet loveable band I've ever heard, *Ishmael and Andy*), and a singer called Pauline Filby who knew Cliff Richard, and actually asked me to hold his dog whilst she sang. Scruffy little thing. The dog, I mean.

There was also a band from Suffolk called *All Things New* (Led Zeppelin meets Billy Graham), who contacted me later to invite me to Ipswich Town Hall to play with Judy Mackenzie (a Big Christian Star) and Doug Barnett (now with *Saltmine*). The net result was that I played around 140 concerts over the country during the next 3 years.

Though Christian "performance" music was becoming quite exciting, worship was still largely *Youth Praise*. People were, however, beginning to write "charismatic" songs, which to qualify had to be dictated verbatim by the Holy Spirit, to consist of 2 or 3 words endlessly repeated, and to be sung with arms waving whilst nervously looking round to see what everyone else was doing.

We legitimate performers had little to do with this! So imagine my horror, around 1974 perhaps, when we heard that the great Graham Kendrick was quite deliberately moving away from folk-rock and into "worship" music. Genius squandered on *Youth Praise*, I thought. Little did I know!

Next ... How I became a rock band, but couldn't afford the equipment.

There were actually quite a number of talented musicians (in the popular field) at Cambridge in my day. That's leaving out my school, where Jean-Jacques Burnel dropped out after O-levels to become, eventually, bass-player for *the Stranglers*, necessitating a cover-up of the fact that his parents owned the *Little Thatch* restaurant in Godalming. But back in Cambridge *Public Foot the Roman* dominated the rock-scene, recording an album before some went off to back Joan Armatrading and write for TV. *Henry Cow* were avant-garde and later acquired cult status. Kim Rew and Simon Boswell were both amazing guitarists who went on to join *Katrina and the Waves* and write film music, respectively.. Nick Barraclough, even then, was an out of work folk musician who now hosts BBC radio programmes on that field.

But the people I worked with most were four Christians from Clare College who formed a band which, even now, is loved by many people if the resale value of their albums is any guide. *Bill Thorp's Water into Wine Band*, shortened for their recording career to *Water into Wine Band* (and even that was thought too long) wrote magic songs and performed them magically. And that's why they got to record two albums (one of them twice), and I didn't. But they did let me work with them (under the name of *Jon Garvey's Water into Newcastle Brown Band*), and gave me the desire to stop trying to sound like *Cream* on my own and form a band too.

Dave Hyde was three years younger than me, but rumours of his ability as a guitarist kept reaching me whenever I was home in Guildford. It was inevitable that we should get together, and we did one day, quite by chance. But the public library not being a good place to practise, we eventually met up at a second season of Butlins Anonymous in Minehead. Our original sound was inevitably derived from Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, the quintessential guitar duo (after all, John was from Guildford anyway), but our other influences eventually coalesced and we became a fusion of *the Incredible String Band* and *Yes*. Doing Pomp Rock as an acoustic duo was never easy, but we always intended to add other musicians to fill out the sound. They just never happened to appear. Or else they kept very quiet.

The group name, *Peculiar Lucan Sauce*, was a theological joke that Dave probably never got. But it did encourage us to be slightly off the wall in our repertoire, which ranged from the evangelistic-concert opener of *Cigareets and Whusky and Wild*, *Wild Women* to our magnum opus, a complete life of Jesus dubbed *The Epic* when it wasn't being plugged as *Atom Close to the Five Bricks Superstar*.

Our career as a touring Christian band took us all over the country in the end. At first we travelled by coach, and Victoria Coach Station became as familiar to us as Heathrow to real musicians. That would have been the album cover – Jon and Dave photographed looking shadow-eyed on a coach bound for Manchester. Things

improved when I got my mini, until the starter switch, mounted under the car, was scoured off on a farm track in Horley, where we shared the bill with *Parchment*.

Peculiar Lucan Sauce reached its zenith when it received a mention in the gigs page of the Christian magazine, *Buzz*. They spelt us wrong. What kind of a name is *Peculiar Luton Sauce*, for goodness' sake? Shortly after that we split up, ostensibly owing to "musical and personal differences" – in fact I had just got married. And wives just don't take to their husbands driving off to the other end of Britain every few days, do they? Though Dave's wife, when he eventually married, did just that, because she's a singer, too. Dave is still a professional musician, so still can't afford the equipment he needs. I now have the wherewithal to play rock on decent stuff – but only because I've got a job that prevents me doing so. This is the paradox of art.

Next...Rock Dinosaurs rule the earth.

In 1983, seeking desperately to prolong adolescence beyond the age of 30, I achieved my life's ambition by getting a Fender Stratocaster (like Hank Marvin's), and joined a rock band. *i2i* rehearsed more than we performed, though a poster for one of our gigs remained stuck high up on the local multi-storey car park for about ten years. Who remembers most bands after ten years? We achieved longevity, did *i2i*! But before that we made enough noise to be noticed by the leader of the local Mission England Choir, which had been formed for the forthcoming Billy Graham Mission. She asked me to assemble some other noisy musicians to play "for the Youth". I lied about my age. My main memory of our event is being repeatedly asked to turn the volume down until even I couldn't hear what I was playing. To some Christians, electric guitars are too loud even when they're unplugged.

But I did get to perform with Linda Pearce, originally a Liverpoolian and a great singer. I formed a new band to help her launch her singing career, and we got as far as playing the Greenbelt Arts Festival Fringe that year. The sound wasn't too good because the sound engineer hit his head on some scaffolding just as we came on. He thought the feedback was his head ringing. But it wasn't bad for Greenbelt, where you were just as likely to find yourself playing through a 30 watt p.a. to a crowd of three people and a puddle. We had thirty people and two puddles. Some record company A&R man (which in the Christian field means also the manager, producer, and tea-boy of the company) heard the set but didn't catch Linda before we drove off. Still, he later caught up with her and she recorded two albums. Distribution wasn't his strong point, though. That's why you never heard the albums.

Old musicians never die – they just do compilation albums. That's if they ever recorded commercially in the first place, which I never did. And old *Christian* musicians just do worship music. And it's interesting how, once you're less at the mercy of a youthful ego, leading people in worship is no longer a refuge for the incompetent, but a challenge and a joy. Somewhere along the way, I've been taught to submit guitar technique to the greater end of helping people meet with God. It's good. Kendrick was right.

But it's quite amazing how you still bump into people who remember your previous work. One of my patients still has a *Peculiar Lucan Sauce* songbook she got at a concert in Colchester in about 1975. I found one of my old songs mysteriously scrawled on a wall in Guildford just a year or two ago. And I can't forget the time when somebody leaned over into my box high up in the Royal Albert Hall and said, "Are you the bloke who wrote *Panton Street Blues*?" When I confessed I was, he leaned back joyfully to share the news with his wife, who'd obviously been subjected to his version from the time they met.

So if, by chance, you were at the *St Tugwell's Arms* in Abersoch in 1974, or in the *Fringe and Scissors* at Greenbelt in '85 – or even listening to *A Little Mazurka* in the school hall in '66, send your reminiscences, on a postcard, to *The Charleston Years, Radio 2, London*. And I'll send you a cassette of *Apache* by return.