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NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD

PETER JEFFERIES: LIFE SENTENCE

by Paul McKessar

Peter Jefferies is a pretty single-minded guy. At the end of the interview I did with him for this story, I noted that he seemed pretty obsessive about this music thing. He leaned over towards me, his eyes gleaming and said "Oh yes, I'm the real thing. Make no mistake, regardless of what people may think, music is the whole reason, not to pick up girls, get famous or impress anybody. It's got this hook in me, I've got no choice but to do it". And then he grinned. "So in that way I'm absolutely 100 percent street credible!"



BLEAK DREAMS ON BEDROOM WALLS

The story begins in New Plymouth in 1981. Peter and his brother Graeme returned home after spending a couple of years in Auckland and decided to give the sleepy town a taste of the new wave experience it had missed out on up till then. They put together a band called Pink Noise and then stole the bass player and drummer from NP's only other "halfway decent" band, Electronically Tested,

to form Nocturnal Projections.

With Peter Jefferies on vocals, Graeme Jefferies on guitar, Brent Jones on bass and Gordon Rutherford on drums, Nocturnal Projections spent most of '81 playing wherever they could around town, and then got lucky, scoring a residency at the Lion Tavern.

"We thrashed it out there for the rest of the year", says Peter, "and by then Graeme and I had this little house out in the country, out in the middle of nowhere, and we were writing songs all the time. By the end of the year we had about seventy original songs".

In February '82, the band decided to chop their set down to the thirty best originals they had and head for Auckland. Within a month or so of their arrival, Nocturnal Projections weren't having to support the likes of the Prime Movers or This Sporting Life, and John Doe, who ran Hit Singles, a small indie, offered them a recording contract.

Their first recording, however, was self-financed and self-released. 'In Purgatory', a snarling slab of post-Joy Division rock, was recorded and mixed, along with its flip 'Nerve Endings In Powerlines', in four hours at Stebbings Studios. The band returned to Stebbings and cut the classic Another Year five song ep for Hit Singles in eight hours, with only one small guitar part on 'Difficult Days' overdubbed.

A second ep, Understanding Another Year In Darkness, was recorded and the band embarked on an extensive national tour from Whangarei to Dunedin in early '83.

"The first two records sound like us", says Peter, "because we didn't have time to get too artificial. But then we went to do the last record, thinking we knew what we were doing, using 21 of the 24 tracks and spending more money and time, and it came out awful. That was the end of Nocturnal Projections, they dropped dead in about April '83 after our one and only tour. The last record came out after that, which didn't make us feel any better".

IN VIEW OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES

The Jefferies brothers next surfaced on their own with the release of the first This Kind of Punishment album. It was obviously them - a dark, sometimes melodramatic statement of the Jefferies art - but gone was the ninety-miles an-hour metallic scouring of the Nocturnals. It had been replaced by something just as raw, but these were songs written around Peter's newly-acquired piano and Graeme's newly-found ability to play

practically any instrument with strings on it, all recorded at their flat onto Gordon Rutherford's four-track. Lyrically Kafkaesque lines hang in mid-air, acheing, until they are retrieved by a piano-chord that rings harshly and is echoed by a quiet guitar line. It was uneasy listening. At least you could dance to Nocturnal Projections ...

"The thing was that we really wanted to change it", says Peter. "We didn't want to be Nocturnal Projections with piano and violin. We threw out the snare drum, we didn't want rock timing or all the instruments playing together flat out all the time. We wanted different instruments and acoustic songs. I personally had got to the stage where I didn't want to have to sing at maximum volume in the loudest register like I had been. Not only that but we'd played something like 130 gigs in two years and it had got very hard ... we were at the point where we couldn't write anything new anymore so we had to turn it on its ear".

ATTENTION TO DETAIL

The first album was about the Jefferies learning to use the four-track; it wasn't even conceived as a record until after it was completed and Chris Knox heard it and persuaded Flying Nun to release it. But straight after finishing it, the Jefferies brothers began writing songs for a follow-up, A Beard of Bees.

"We were writing it for the four-track this time. As we were composing the songs, we were composing little diagrams of where it would go on the tracks and how you could bounce this over to here etc. We knew exactly how much we could fit on. It was an absolutely deliberate attempt to write an album which we thought would suit the recording equipment, rather than writing songs, recording them and realising that we had an album, which was what had happened the first time".

It took them fifteen months to complete the record. Chris Matthews of Childrens Hour, who had helped out on a couple of tracks on the first record, joined TKP halfway through. Barely closer to "rock" than the first album, A Beard of Bees nevertheless is a wide-ranging and accessible record. Matthews contributes the beautiful 'Sleepwalker'; Graeme's tasteful guitaring, violining, mandolinizing etc is all over it; and things get distinctly Ubu-ish on 'East Meets West'. The seven-minute closer, 'An Open Denial', focuses attention on Peter's piano and the vocal harmonies ... "what more

could be required?"

"Beard of Bees, was the first really classic record I thought we'd made", says Peter. "I'd liked bits of the others, but this was the first one I thought was absolutely brilliant. But by the time we'd completed it, Graeme and I were both pretty much mentally exhausted.

It was an endurance test to keep songs in your head for that amount of time; fifteen months is a long time to work on one record.

IS IT ART?

"So then we turned around and whacked out the 5 By Four ep in a week, real fast, just to change the approach. Johnny Pierce [who had played bass in Childrens Hour] joined the day we started recording it. The first thing he did in the band was spend a week recording, and I don't think we could've made that record if he hadn't been there cos we were all so tired. We couldn't go any further in that direction; after spending 15 months writing a really precise, pseudo-classical kind of record, again, we really wanted to change it, so spending a week writing a really rapidfire, composed almost straight onto the tape kind of record seemed a really good antidote to that, and it was".

With Johnny Pierce on bass, TKP started playing live as a four-piece and did a NZ tour. 5 By Four was the band's most self-consciously "arty" record ('Flipper Go Home' - "Is it art or is it just us") but live, TKP entered a dynamically rock(ist?) phase of development, documented on the Xpressway cassette TKP Live '85. The difficult timings, gaps and pauses remained intact, but the latent power of their songs truly came alive. In July '85, the band performed for the last time at the Nitpickers Picnic multi-media event in Auckland.

"The Nitpicker's Picnic was the best we were ever going to be, the peak", says Peter. "We were all wound up, we knew it was going to be the last one. After that it was definitely 'take a break' time - for me and Graeme especially. We'd been writing and performing non-stop for nearly four years so we were gonna split up and reassess things.

"Graeme stayed in Auckland and started writing songs, some of which ended up on his solo album. Johnny and Chris were going to be Headless Chickens, and I ended up down here in Dunedin".

SWAYING INTO TOWN, FEET CAN GLIDE ALONG

In Dunedin, Jefferies was ready to have a

break. But after Shayne Carter invited him round to have a jam one day, things changed. The untimely death of Wayne Elsey had ended Carter's band, the Double Happys, and he, like Peter, was in something of a limbo. He had an almost-finished song called 'Randolph's Going Home' and after four hours playing, Peter had supplied the drumming that completed a "bloody amazing song that we just had to record".

TKP had involved a certain amount of drumming for Peter (who'd been a drummer from age 13) but his major role for four years had been that of vocalist, as well as playing piano or drums at the same time as singing in TKP. "Randolph got us both back into it I think", he says. "It was great for me cos I could drum and sort of produce cos the four-track thing was kinda my baby."

"Having done 'Randolph' I was enthusiastic again, and I wanted Graeme and I to do at least one more record with all these songs that were littered around from the last 5 or 6 years and pull together a closing TKP record. We had about 14 songs that we really liked and we pruned it down to the best 9, and that was In The Same Room".

In The Same Room covers an enormous timespan. It was recorded on four-track in Dunedin between May '86 and March '87, but the real story of it is that its songs date from 1980 (Graeme's 'Men By The Pool', with new lyrics) to '87 (the only new songs recorded, 'Immigration Song' and 'Left Turns Right'). 'Don't Go' and 'Words Fail Me' were two of the last songs written by Nocturnal Projections in '82, and 'Overground in China' was a completely rearranged Nocturnal's song that was dropped by the band because it had sounded too much like the song 'You'll Never Know'. 'On Various Days' and 'Ivan Fyodorovitch' dated from Beard of Bees sessions, and Michael Morley's song 'Holding' was one that TKP performed at a one-off performance in Dunedin in 1986, with Morley and Shayne Carter joining the Jefferies in the band.

"In the way we'd cast the net fairly widely for A Beard of Bees, in the way we did it and the amount of instruments we'd used, In The Same Room cast the net widely too, in that it was everything, the whole trip from before Nocturnal Projections right up to the end of TKP, trying to put it all together on one record. And I think it worked; I think it's the best record I've ever made. I hardly ever feel dissatisfied with it, and it's the only one I play at the moment".

TKP had first gone back to recording Nocturnals songs on 5 By Four, where there is a version of 'Out Of Our Hands' which had

instruments dubbed over the original 45 rpm track being played at 33. The idea had come to them when their father had written confessing that when he first played a copy of Understanding Another Year they had sent him, he'd listened to it at the wrong speed. The Jefferies went back and listened to all their old Nocturnals stuff at 33 and decided 'Out Of Our Hands' sounded really good, so decided to redo it on 5 By Four. "The only way we could get that at the right speed was by using the bloody record", says Peter, "which meant that it was in this bizarre, unknown key that Graeme could pick to, but not play chords to. Everything's slightly out of key, but it has a weird, angelic quality to it that I like very much".

The Nocturnals songs on In The Same Room were recorded partly because the Nocturnal Projections had always planned to do another record, and also because they wanted versions of those songs that sounded a bit more like the Nocturnals had really sounded, according to Peter, "not over a big, slick PA in Auckland, but in a grotty little hall in the middle of nowhere, because we did so many gigs like that. We wanted it to sound like we sounded on virtually no equipment - so many of our gigs were played that way - and I think those songs really work. In The Same Room sounds very real; it spans seven years, and there's all these ghosts of various people littered through it. It feels like they're all in there, but it's just me and Graeme really".

At the same time that In The Same Room came out, Flying Nun released the instrumental lp At Swim-Two-Birds, a collaboration between Peter Jefferies and Dunedin musician Jono Lonie. In two weeks the two came up with an album of material, recorded on piano and guitar, and for Peter, the effect was very much to work in the same spirit as 5 By Four. "It was like, let's get the machine and go out to Portobello and experiment. Not having to sing freed me up from having to write conventional song structures, riffs and choruses."

"As an antidote to In The Same Room, At Swim is an album that it's alright to put on not too loudly and cruise around to; you don't have to listen to it, which is in contrast to all my other records, like In The Same Room, where you'd really meant to be in there. I'd felt compelled to do that record but it was over for me and Graeme after that, we both pretty much knew that".

This Kind of Punishment made deliberately difficult music. Sometimes it seemed like you needed a cipher to tune in to what was

really going on, but perhaps that made TKP records stand amongst the best produced in this country this decade.

"If you write jolly songs about going to the beach, people'll go along with it, but they go on about us and depression ... it's not like we're hellbent on bringing everyone down, it's just that I haven't got anything much to say about a day at the beach or how enjoyable it was getting totally drunk the other night.

"Songs come to me, like a radio receiver picking them up, and something has to really shake me up before I'll write about it, so maybe that's why some people find the subject matter a bit heavy. But bands like the Chills and Verlaines are playing watered down versions of that emotion. It's a NZ attitude, a bit like playing music to a bunch of sissys. TKP is music for a solitary person, not party music, and we don't tend to get a lot of immediate feedback. But I know they are out there, and the music's made for those sort of people".

FATE OF THE HUMAN CARBINE

After a period of drumming in Dunedin band Plagal Grind, and not writing any songs, Peter teamed up with Robbie Muir, the other half of the PG rhythm section to record a single, 'Catapult' c/w 'The Fate Of the Human Carbine'. Lyrically and musically perhaps his most straightforward outings, the two songs are quite simply superb, with Robbie Muir playing bass and guitar, Peter on piano, drums and vocals, and what seems like an enormous, spacious production for a four-track recording. And a true pointer to Jefferies obsessive nature came with the fact that release of the single on Xpressway is to be funded with Peter's winnings from two weeks spent betting on horses with his mum at Christmas - deliberately done with the sole purpose being to pull together enough money to put out the record! Bloody minded dedication to his music (I would've taken the money off for a good time, but that's me ...).

"It's got possession of my soul, well and truly, like I haven't any choice - that corny old thing. That's why TKP were called This Kind Of Punishment - not as an attempt to describe the music, but to say what it was: on bad days, it is "kind of" punishment, but it's the opposite when it's good. It's still the best thing, even after the times I've wished I could get away from it".

There you go.

DISCOGRAPHY

Peter & Graeme Jefferies 1981-89.

(NB: All dates are those of recording, not release.)

1. **Nocturnal Projections:** PJ (vocal), GJ (gtr), Gordon Rutherford (drum)
Scott Jones (bass)
 - a. Things That Go Bump in the Night (1981) Self-released.
- Cassette, deleted.
 - b. November 1981 (1981) Self-released.
- Cassette, deleted.
 - c. In Purgatory/Where Ends in the Power Lines (1982) Self-released.
- 7" single, deleted.
 - d. Another Year (1982) Mit Singles.
- 12" EP, currently still available.
- Tracks: You'll Never Know/Isn't That Strange/Could It be Increased/Difficult Days/Out of My Hands.
 - e. Understanding Another Year in Darkness (1983) Mit Singles.
- 12" EP, deleted.
- Tracks: Understanding/Another Year/In Darkness.
2. **This Kind of Punishment:** GJ (gtr/vocal), PJ (vocal/piano/drum)
Also associated with the group: Andrew Frenigler, Gordon Rutherford, Michael Harrison, Chris Matthews, Johnny Fields, Maxine Fleming, Michael Morley, Alastair Galbraith, Shayne Carter.
 - a. This Kind of Punishment (1983) Flying Man.
- Album, deleted.
- Tracks: After the Fact/Instrumental/Don't Take Throat/In view of the Circumstances/Two Minutes Growing/If an Ace is an Ace/Just Another Funeral/Some More Than Others/Ahead of Their Time.
 - b. Beard of Bees (1984) Self-released.
- Album, deleted.
- Tracks: Prelude/From the Diary of Hermann Doubt/The Horrible Camp/Trepidation/East Meets West/Turning to Stone/although they appear/The Sleepwalker/An Open Dental.
 - c. 8 by Four (1985) Flying Man.
- 12" EP, currently available.
- Tracks: North Head/Out of My Hands/MP Tic Tac/What Can I Say?/Flipper to Home.
 - d. TKP Live '85 (1986) Xpressway.
- Cassette, currently available.
- Tracks: The Sleepwalker/MP Tic Tac/The Man by the Pool/Don't Take Throat/After the Fact/Ahead of Their Time/Two Minutes Growing/Radio Silence/From the Diary of Hermann Doubt/Just Another Funeral/Flipper to Home/Some More Than Others.
 - e. In the Same Room (1987) Flying Man.
- Album, currently available.
- Tracks: Immigration Song/Overground in China/Holding Left Turns Right/On Various Days/Don't Go/The Man by the Pool/Tram Prosekovitch/words Fall Me.
3. **Compilations:**
 - a. Nocturnal Projections 'Words Fall Me' (Live) SISING OUR TIME (cassette), failed.
 - b. Nocturnal Projections 'Walk in a Straight Line' (Live) XPRESSWAY FILE-UP (cassette), XPRESSWAY.
 - c. This Kind of Punishment 'Reaching an End' (Studio) XPRESSWAY FILE-UP
 - d. The Cake Kitchen 'Altraps' (Demo) XPRESSWAY FILE-UP
 - e. Plagal Grind 'Midnight Blue Vision' (Studio) & 'Blackout' (Live) XPRESSWAY FILE-UP
 - f. This Kind of Punishment 'Immigration Song' (from 'In the Same Room EP') IN LOVE WITH THREE TIMES (Compact Disc), Flying Man.
4. **Other Projects:**
 - a. SHAYNE CARTER/PETER JEFFERIES Randolph's Going Home (1985) Flying Man.
- 7" single, deleted.
- Tracks: Randolph's Going Home/Noosed, Lived and Buried.
 - b. GRAEME JEFFERIES Messages for the Cake Kitchen (1987) Flying Man.
- Album, currently available.
- Tracks: All the Colours Has Grr/Reason to keep Swimming/Prisoner of a Single Passion/Working That's New/The Simple Tapestry of Papa/If the Moon Dies/The Cardhouse/The Greenkeepers/In the Timing Wrong?
 - c. PETER JEFFERIES/HONO LOHIE At Swim 2 Birds (1988) Flying Man.
- Album, currently available.
- Tracks: Introduction/Taster with the Silver/Piano One/Intercalia/At Swim 2 Birds/Parachella/Where the Flies Sleep/The Standing Stone/Aerial/Short Was Fast/Piano Two.
5. **Forthcoming:**
 - a. THE CAKE KITCHEN EP, Flying Man.
- band featuring Graeme Jefferies, Robert Kay, Rachel King, will be released 1989, 4 tracks.
 - b. PLAGAL GRIND EP, XPRESSWAY.
- band featuring Peter Jefferies, Alastair Galbraith, Robbie Muir and David Mitchell. To be released 1989, 4 tracks.
 - c. ALASTAIR GALBRAITH/GRAEME JEFFERIES 'Timebomb', XPRESSWAY.
- 7" single recorded 1988, b/w Bravely, Bravely. To be released 1989.
 - d. PETER JEFFERIES/ROBBIE MUIR 'Catapult', XPRESSWAY.
- 7" single b/w The Fate of the Human Carbine. To be released 1989.