



MIKE BENNETT

JUST WHO IS

THE BLOCKHEADS?

NEW SINGER?

INTERVIEW BY ALICE JONES-RODGERS.

**“... IF YOU WANTED A CARBON COPY,
THEN YOU WOULD GO AND SEE A
TRIBUTE BAND! BUT, THEN,
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN,
ONE DOES NOT WANT TO STRAY
FROM THE PATH TOO MUCH ...”**

It is 8.15pm on the 5th of August and Mike Bennett has just stepped out on to the stage at Blackpool's Rebellion Festival to make his debut appearance as the new frontman of The Blockheads. Not only must Bennett entertain the gargantuan crowd assembled in the Empress Ballroom for the next hour having had very little prior rehearsal, but he also has some big boots to fill, being the direct successor to the role following the death of the much loved Derek Hussey (aka “Derek the Draw”), who sadly passed away on the 18th of February, and the man now charged with the unenviable task of continuing the legacy of an outfit who started life back in 1977 as the backing band for the legendary Ian Dury.

However, Bennett's credentials in the arts and entertainment industry

made him the perfect choice for the job, with the Cheltenham-born sixty-year-old having managed to carve out an incredible reputation not only as the frontman of bands such as Hiding in the Tall Grass and The Stenz, alongside various ex-members of The Fall, but also as a writer in many fields, including music, theatre and comedy; actor; producer and most recently, a film director, with his utterly unique Zombie-come-Horror-come-Musical opus ‘Vegan Vampires from Zorg’ due to be premiered, rather appropriately, on Halloween night.

We could talk at great length here about Bennett's achievements over the course of a career which began in earnest at the age of just seventeen when he received his first writing commission for the BBC, but with so much to cover, we caught up with the



man himself for the following in-depth interview. Before we begin though, he is keen to ascertain where the name of our publication originated. Upon telling him that it was taken from Hazel O'Connor's 1980 hit of the same name featured on the soundtrack to 'Breaking Glass', he playfully prepares us for one of many stories from the last five and a half decades featured in this interview, by saying, "It's funny, because I've produced Hazel O'Connor! I can tell you a bit of a story about Hazel, but I don't know whether I want it to be printed! [Laughs]. I did an album with Hazel called 'Ignite' [2002]. We did it at her cottage and it was wonderful, but it didn't start off wonderful! I could tell the story and everything, but it's a bit of a shaggy dog story!" And so, as we wonder whether he will spill the beans about that first encounter with O'Connor, Eighth Day poses the question, "Just who is The Blockheads' new singer?"

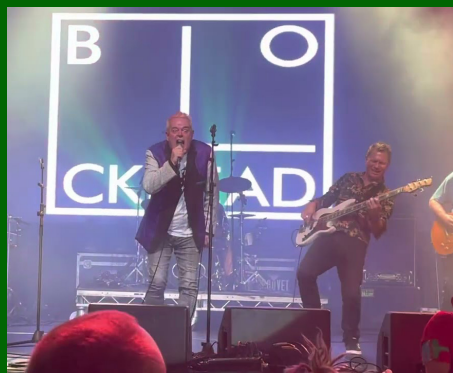
Firstly, hello Mike and thank you for



Mike on stage at Rebellion Festival

agreeing to our interview, it is lovely to speak to you. Before we talk about your astounding career so far, let's dive right in to the very present, because Friday the 5th of August saw you make your live debut as the new vocalist of The Blockheads at Rebellion Festival in Blackpool. How did your involvement with The Blockheads come about and how did you find the experience of stepping out on stage as their new singer in front of that massive crowd in the Empress Ballroom?

My first Blockheads show, yeah! With The Blockheads, it was by reference really, so I got a phone call from Chaz Jankel and we'd been aware of each other for quite some time and the reason being that I worked at a record label as a producer, and they were called M-Bop, and the art director and film maker and video maker at that label was called Dylan Martin and he simultaneously worked with as an art director for Chaz Jankel. And I'm in the middle of making a movie ['Vegan Vampires from Zorg'] ... well, it's



almost finished ... and it goes on a cinematic tour in the new year and it's a long tour with artists from the film, like John Otway; Melanie Williams [of Sub Sub fame] and Peter Hook and it's an immersive cinematic experience and I'm in the film and Chaz became aware of me, because he's been keeping a beady eye on the shenanigans surrounding it. So, basically, Chaz phoned me up and it was very quick and there had been a lapse in The Blockheads schedule as far as touring was concerned because of the obvious constraints of lockdown and very sadly, the last vocalist [Derek "Derek the Draw" Hussey] passed [on the 18th February this year] and will be greatly missed by the fans, because he was there for a very, very long time [since 2000] and very much part of The Blockheads' legacy. In fact, he had known Ian Dury for a long time [as well as being a close friend, he was also Dury's minder], so when he was in the band, he knew all the songs back to front because he'd lived, slept and breathed them. So, you know, he was wonderful, I've seen the performances,

and obviously, prior to that, I saw Ian Dury many times and I loved the opus album, 'New Boots and Panties!!!' [1977], particularly. I did like 'Do It Yourself' [1979] and 'Laughter' [1980] very much, but that debut album, Ian Dury, 'New Boots and Panties!!!' was part of the soundtrack to my adolescence in a way, so it was pretty much a full circle thing to get that phone call. And because the group live far apart and it's all very quick with bookings, I only really got to do one day's rehearsal! It was a very short rehearsal, about five or six hours! That was fine, as far as I was concerned, because we weren't going on tour until October and then Rebellion [Festival] came in and the penny dropped! I just had to get up there and do it and it's not really about going up there as Mike Bennett, it's about serving the songs. It's certainly not about doing an impersonation. The songs are part of heritage really and the reason I love the songs is because they're three dimensional because they've got a sort of Music Hall feel to them and also a thematic thing going on with



characters such as ‘Clever Trevor’; ‘Plaistow Patricia’; ‘Billericay Dickie’ [all ‘New Boots and Panties!!!’], the ‘Inbetweenies’ [‘Do It Yourself’] ... and these characters belong on the stage as well as on vinyl and there is a theatricality and there is almost a nod towards other English creations such as ‘A Clockwork Orange’ [1962 novel by Anthony Burgess and 1971 film] and all kind of surrealist literature and references to Noel Coward and all things British really and that’s what I find fascinating about The Blockheads. And indeed, with people like Micky [Mick] Gallagher, who also played with The Clash [on ‘London Calling’, 1979; ‘Sandinista!’, 1980 and ‘Cut the Crap’, 1984], but because you’ve got Micky on keys, you’ve got this kind of Jazz Funk thing going on. And then there’s Chaz Jankel; great writer, Chaz and plays both keyboards and guitar, but nods towards Afro-Beat and that kind of stuff. I’d say that the only sort of New Wave, Punk element is the vocal, apart from on odd tracks like ‘Blockheads’ [‘New Boots and

Panties!!!’] and ‘Plaistow Patricia’. You know, there’s a very rich mix ... Dub; that kind of four to the floor Jazz Funk., ‘Hit Me with Your Rhythm Stick’ [1978], of course, being a classic example and things like ‘Inbetweenies’ almost projects a Bal[-Musette] kind of feel with a Punk sensibility on the vocal and I’ve worked as a songwriter, lyricist, for many bands and a lot of people think that lyrics are not important, but Ian Dury, could you imagine it without those lyrics?! It’s the juxtaposition between the very sheen of the production and fantastic musicality of the band and slightly jagged vocal delivery, which was most certainly born out of the music halls and I think that Music Hall travelled into Glam and I think that it travelled into Punk and if you think, you had Pearly Kings and Queens and they were very glam, actually and they came from poverty ... even under a stone actually ... and they were not classified as legit theatre. Music halls were dens of inequity and what I say is, ‘When the going gets tough, the tough become [laughs]



John Turnbull



Mick Gallagher

glamorous!’ And that comes from the UK and you had a mirror image of that, which was Vaudeville, on the other side of pond. It was years later actually, but it was a mirror image. And then, you transport old time Music Hall, the Marie Lloyds and all those people, you transport those into the ‘70s and you’ve got the Glam Rock period and in the Glam Rock period was another tough time, where you had the three-day week and you also had miners’ strikes and you had the black and white TV and you had the colour TV and once more, when the going got tough, the UK guys went glam! The theatricality of the Brits! Like old time Music Hall, it was made by the working class for the working class, but, ironically, in the Glam Rock period, a very colourful period, the working class only had black and white TVs! How ironic is that?! And then, we move from Glam, or Glam travelled the pond and Punk came in, because that was the bond when Sweet, T. Rex and [David] Bowie, they all went to America and influenced the American Glam Metal scene, the Frankenstein of Glam and

out came bands like Mötley Crüe; KISS and Twisted Sister and in the interim period, Punk and Pub Rock was merging ... from the suburbs and from out of London and indeed, from the East End and you had the Canvey Island thing and coming out of cabaret almost came Pub Rock. And that was living simultaneously at one point with the Glam Rock, but the Glam thing did fizzle, but later on, people like The Damned covered tracks like ‘Ballroom Blitz’ [Sweet, 1973, covered by The Damned, featuring Mötörhead’s Lemmy on bass, and featured on the B-side of their 1979 single ‘I Just Can’t Be Happy Today’]. And, in fact, a lot of the Punk bands nod and doff their hats to Glam. If you look at Rebellion Festival, every year they have a Glam band on! But, going back to Ian Dury, he represented that fantastic spectacle of British theatricality draped around fantastic songs and bright lyrics ... sometimes very dark lyrics, but very bright in the way that they were written. Like counterculture that’s also mainstream; that’s an achievement! You know, I was born out of theatre.

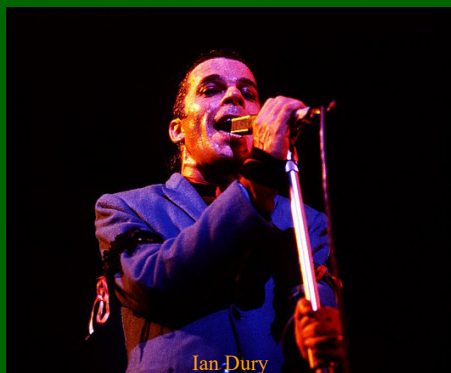
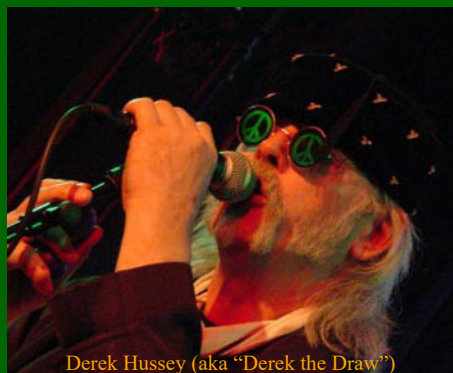


I went to drama school, I became an actor and whilst I was an actor, I met other actors and went on to produce some of them because a lot of them went into music, like Toyah [‘Dreamchild’, 1994], like Hazel O’Connor [‘Ignite’, 2002], because I’ve been involved in acting, writing, composing, painting and it all comes under one umbrella ... I have very much noticed that when I’ve produced an artist, they’ve always got another artistic bent and, you know, what I say to people is, ‘Out of one hundred things, I’m only good at three!’ So, you know, and all three of those are under the artistic banner it would seem! But, going back to The Blockheads, that is going full circle for me, because obviously, I have performed in plays ... I was in the West End [London] in a play before lockdown, called ‘Poezest’, which I also wrote and I’ve obviously been [acted] in my own film [‘Vegan Vampires from Zorg’] and I’ve been in my own plays and I did, obviously, the Samuel Beckett play, ‘Rough for Theatre I & II’ at the Arts [Theatre] in the West End [London, alongside Steve



Harley, 2007], but those things were very short-lived and the main thing that I’ve been doing is scriptwriting and [music] producing and enjoying it very much, but when I got that phone call, I thought ‘right, I’m back on the boards again!’ ... in a slightly different way, but, you know, little by little, piece by piece, we [The Blockheads] will continue to do some more shows. But it’s very ironic that my film opens, so I’m touring with The Blockheads and they’re running in tandem, so it’s quite stressful! I think I did 120 hours last week! Yeah, I only ever sleep for a maximum of four hours anyway! [Laughs]. I was born an insomniac and that has meant that I’ve had more time to work!

Well, that’s a bonus, isn’t it! As you were just saying, your appointment as the band’s new vocalist comes following the sad passing of your predecessor, Derek Hussey (aka “Derek the Draw”) on the 18th of February of this year, who had previously been Ian Dury’s close friend and minder and had taken up



the position in 2000, co-writing with founding Blockhead Chaz Jankel. So, following, not only Dury, but also Hussey is no mean feat, but when you were asked to join the band, was being entrusted to continue the lineage of great Blockheads frontmen something that filled you with excitement or something that filled you with trepidation?

I took it in a stoic way. I felt honoured, because Derek was so good and Ian was so good, and of course, I did see the Phill Jupitus rendition as well [Jupitus performed with The Blockheads on their 2007 thirtieth anniversary tour and has appeared on stage with them sporadically various times since], I’ve seen those as well, and I’ve not seen anybody do a carbon copy, because if you wanted a carbon copy, then you would go and see a tribute band! But, then, on the other side of the coin, one does not want to stray from the path too much and I can take anything with a pinch of salt as far as people analysing what it’s all about. I just hope that we can continue to ring

the changes and get the catalogue out to a wide audience, because, you know, it’s a piece of theatre. The band are absolutely amazing! John Roberts, the drummer, is so amazing and the bass player as well, Nathan King, is just incredible! There are two bass players of course, there is Norman [Watt-Roy] and there is Nathan, and in equal measures, they both really completely ride the groove and bind the band together. I have to say that John Turnbull is one of my favourite guitar players, so to be on a stage with John Turnbull, who incidentally, played with Paul Young at Live Aid and it was the longest guitar solo [one minute] at Live Aid [on ‘Come Back and Stay’, ‘No Parlez, 1983]! A little titbit there for you! The thing is, when Chaz Jankel and John Turnbull play guitar together, they appear to kind of weave, but John is like, you know when a young footballer comes on to pitch, they’re all over the place and they’re tackling and they’re whacking the ball into the back of the net, and as they get older, they learn to become more strategic and John leaves a lot of space in his guitar



work and it's not always what he's playing, but what he's not playing and Chaz Jankel is so complimentary to him that it is as effective as Ronnie Wood and Keith Richards. I mean, at the end of 'Hit Me with Your Rhythm Stick', he's [Turnbull] actually got the guitar so it's talking! It's just amazing and to be working with John and Chaz and Micky Gallagher is quite a surreal experience because they provided the soundtrack to my youth. Incredibly, when I was standing up on that stage, I saw a lot of youths and each and every one of them knew each and every lyric, which was tremendous, but it's great that The Blockheads have transcended the genres and have got this like following of very, very young people and I think like the barriers are broken now, because, you know, when I was young, the parents of myself and many of my friends were either teddy boys, whilst we were punks, or they were into Petula Clark and stuff, but nowadays, young people have no inhibitions at all and without prejudice, will rifle through their parents' back catalogue, records that they bought having listened to

them at a local vinyl store, and get into it. That's fantastic! The first, I'd say ten rows, were full of very young people and they all had Blockheads T-shirts on and had come to see the group. So, it really is quite an emotional thing for the group. I mean, to come out of the Derek period, because they very much loved Derek and then they had to go through the whole lockdown, so they were very much itching to get back on stage and what's amazing is, the enthusiasm is there, the enthusiasm is still there, the drive is still there and, you know, the repertoire has already been created. So, the way I see it is that, you know, Ian Dury was a painter anyway and then, it's like, the songs have not dated, they sound as fresh as ever. And I also loved Kilburn and the High Roads [Dury's pre-Ian Dury and the Blockheads outfit, 1970-1975], because they had this kind of Pub Rock feel to them, a jolly old knees up kind of feel, but with elements of sophistication and sardonic lyrics sung from the corner of the mouth. You know, when people think of Punk Rock and New Wave as



just screaming and shouting down the microphone, but, you know, I think that's where the term New Wave comes in, because you've got Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex and there's an example of Punk, New Wave, whatever you want to call it, but, to me, the way it should be, unique; unique individuals, you know. Musically, you needed those guys screaming down the mics, because they provided the soil in which, you know, fertile seeds could grow and a lot grew from those fertile seeds. From every listen to a Blockheads track, listeners will discover something new and that's why they have resonated with audiences for a gargantuan amount of time. Trends may come and go, but a good body of work will always resurface. All of the tracks are evergreen. I've got my own personal favourites, the Music Hall orientated pieces like, for instance, to some extent 'Clever Trevor', but more 'Billericay Dickie' and '[There Ain't Half Been Some] Clever Bastards' [B-side of 'Hit Me with Your Rhythm Stick'] and also, some of the Kilburns stuff, you know, a mix of English



Music Hall and Reggae, like 'You're More Than Fair' ['Wotabunch', 1977] and stuff, and no one had done that and in such a clever way. And actually, Ian Dury was quite astute to mix that kind of Music Hall thing with Reggae, because in Jamaica, they have a thing called Dance Hall, as you know, but they have Pantomime and that's kind of mash-up from a Jamaican perspective. But, Ian Dury was clearly listening to a lot of different music and Chaz Jankel's repertoire is so diverse; I mean, he scored Horror music for a Stephen King film starring Debbie Harry ['Tales from the Darkside', 1990]! He can go from scoring really moody stuff to doing upbeat happy stuff and I think it was a meeting of minds with Ian Dury and Chaz Jankel like Lennon and McCartney. You know, it's that kind of a thing really. I know I should do, but I want to see the film 'Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll' [2010]. I've wanted to see it for quite some time, but it doesn't appear to be on Netflix. I've got to see it, it's on my wishlist, because it's got elements of cartoon ... because, my new movie, 'Vegan Vampires from Zorg',



has animation, it has Punk, but The Blockheads are not in this film! Every other band, you name it, they are in there ... Sham 69; Hazel O'Connor; Peter Hook; Rami Jaffy from the Foo Fighters and we've got Darryl Hannah on vocals.

So, as you have just talked about there, that other current project is a Punk vegan slasher movie called 'Vegan Vampires from Zorg'. We believe that making this film has been far from plain-sailing, so could you tell us the story of this film?

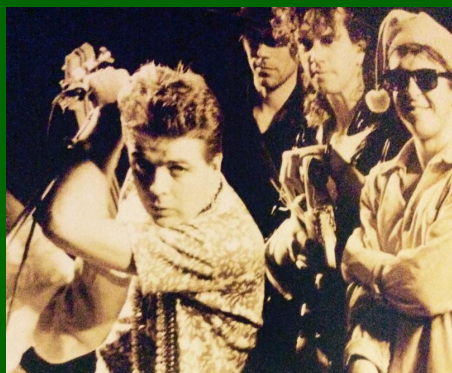
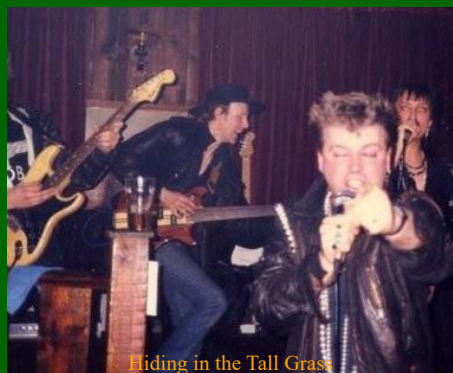
What happened was, I saw, along with two other friends of mine, at the NAMM Festival, while we were performing there at one of our shows at Anaheim Stadium [California] and my lawyer [Terry Marsh] was with me and he said, 'You're a vinyl junkie, aren't you?' and I said, 'I certainly am!' and he said to this actor chap he was with and said, 'You're a vinyl junkie, aren't you?', his name was Steve Watson, and he said, 'Yep!' So, he [Marsh] said, 'Well, let's go to the oldest vinyl store

in Huntingdon [Vinyl Solutions, Huntingdon Beach, California] and there's a proposal for Mike at the end of it'. So, we went into this vinyl store and it was antiquated and wonderful. Some people had cobwebs tattooed on their faces, some were wearing cop hats, it was a very eccentric kind of a place, but Huntingdon had been the home of creativity, and I said, 'Okay, look, this proposal?' and Terry and Steve said, 'I want you to write a documentary about this store' and I said, 'I don't write documentaries' and then, I met the owner and he was this gregarious, dark character and I discovered his name was Drak! And I said, 'Wait a minute, perhaps we could do the documentary, but can I put a spin on it?' and Terry Marsh said, 'What's the spin?' and I said, 'I want to put the vegan vampires in the Vault [of the store].' And he said, 'That's a great idea!' So, we went back to England and we raised the money and we took a crew of about thirteen out there. We made two trips and from day one, we were in trouble. One actor was arrested on the aeroplane. He was allegedly



drunk and throwing Prosecco around and as we touched into Chicago, the police jumped onto the plane, seven guns to the head, he spent three nights in a cell and was deported back to the UK. And so, I was one actor down and then, another member of the cast, an American actress this time, collapsed and hurt her head very badly indeed, an ambulance arrived and took her away and when we were commissioned ... well, actually, we were asked to go and identify her, so we thought she was dead! They said, 'Can you come in and identify her?' So, we feared the worst and we went in there and they ferreted through her handbag, because she was out cold, and they found her passport and they said, 'Can you identify her?' But she'd signed her contract under a different [fake] name, so that completely and utterly marginalised our insurance! And things just got worse from there. David Emmons of the band Kavanagh witnessed an axe killing on Huntingdon pier and the authorities got involved and wanted to get his statement and he was so traumatised that they sent him for counselling and

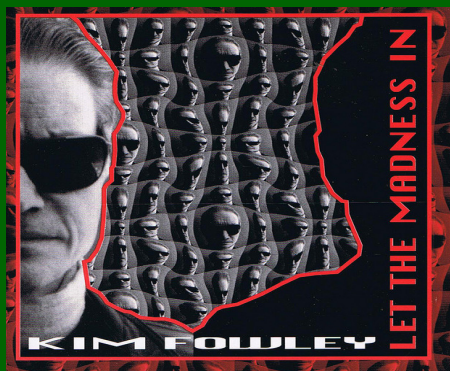
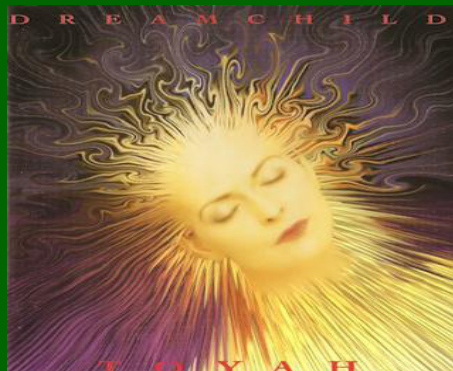
when he arrived, the counsellors were one-bodied, two-headed Siamese twins! A very rare strain of Siamese twins! So, this completely freaked him out! And one was a boy and one was a girl! And one of them played him Enya and the other one played him Murder Junkies! Completely insane! And he was more traumatised by that than he was from witnessing the axe killing! So, the whole thing was absolutely insane and he's followed the case and the axe murderer escaped! And apparently, at one point, he was working as a charity worker in Borneo! It's like, you couldn't make this up! And put this on the top, one of the UK actresses went missing with this chap, who was literally about two foot three [inches] tall and she had access to the budget and they went off and shot a hardcore porn movie on the budget! And the porn movie is out and they stole all our files and the hard drive with the film on it! So, when we got back to the UK ... we went out with thirteen and only five of us came back! Oh, and just to go back, the guy who they had to cart off the plane, that was



on Twin Towers memorial day on American Airlines! But, anyway, when we got back to the UK, lockdown happened and I had to scratch my head and think ‘What are we going to do?’ All the film had been stolen, but then I realised we still had some stuff on the cutting room floor. So, I started playing it and I thought ‘oh, this is quite funny!’ ... ‘oh, that’s been shot on a telephone!’ And we actually heard the thudding of the actress collapsing and being carted off to hospital and there was the pornographer taking our actress away, the little chap, the two foot two chap, who we refer to in the film as ‘munchkin’ ... we’re still trying to find them, actually! And then, we made up a collage of all these incidents. We set about tracking down everybody that was in the movie that went horribly wrong and interviewed them and this is how we managed to get the story with a complete flow and a timeline, that element. So, really, it is a horror film, [laughs] by default, about a horror film that went wrong! It’s a ‘shockumentary’! But, then, I still thought ‘wait a minute, there’s

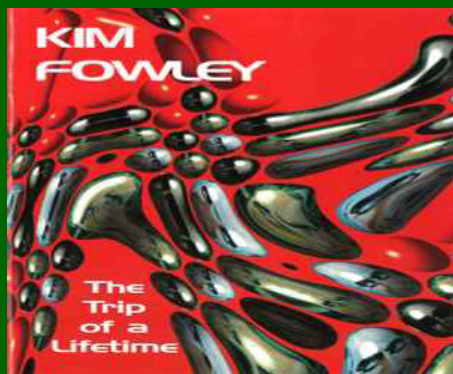
something missing here! We’ve got this fly-on-the-wall thing and we’ve got interviews, but we’re missing something, so we will go and make a soundtrack to it!’ This is where we brought in Peter Hook and Melanie Williams of ‘Ain’t No Love (Ain’t No use)’ [Sub Sub, ‘Full Fathom Five’, 1994] fame and we’ve got tracks by members of the Sex Pistols ... we’ve got Glen Matlock and Hazel O’Connor’s cousin [Charlie O’Connor] doing ‘Germ Free Adolescents’ [X-Ray Spex ‘Germ Free Adolescents’, 1978]. But, we wrote the soundtrack and got in a music supervisor and we kind of co-supervised it with him and all the songs are kind of representing what happened, so it’s also a kind of musical, so it’s very ambitious and it opens on the 29th of October.

We believe that ‘Vegan Vampires from Zorg’ has its premiere on Halloween night, with a preview on the 29th October. But, rather than it just being a film in a cinema, you are doing something quite different with it, aren’t you?



We're doing a cinema tour next year; we've got a six cinema deal for next year and we're showing a different cut every night. And what we're doing, we're treating it as a gig and we're doing unusual places like dungeons, caves, record stores and what we're doing as well, the audience gets to be immersed into it; it's an immersive experience. The proper premiere is the 31st October and the preview is on the 29th. So, we're at Victoria Vaults [York] for a Halloween special on the 31st [October] and the audience get to edit the film. It's quite hard to explain! But, the music will be augmented by John Otway and We've Got a Fuzzbox and We're Going to Use It. They will be playing live around the actual film, just like they did back in the days of silent film! That's what gave me the idea. So, when there is just talking and dialogue, it will be augmented by these brilliant people and indeed, it will be augmented by stars who are in the film. Pre-show, we will have a green carpet event ... because it's vegan, so green and the stars from the film will be on hand to have a VIP luminous green

cocktail for those who are wanting something a little bit more! Obviously, it costs them a little bit more, but it's fun, you know. And anybody who edits, because they're changing the film as it goes along, they get their credits on the film! That way, hopefully, they'll come and see it again! [Laughs]. And they also get a passport to Zorg as well! I mean, another thing that happened during the making of the movie was that our YouTube channel got taken down. 'Vegan vampires, what do they do?'; 'They can't eat meat, so why are they vampires?' ... they kill you, you see, with needles, with this syrup and they can't bite, but they inject, so they don't take, they give and what they do to their poor, poor victims is they chop them up into little tiny pieces and then bathe in their blood. But luckily for the victims, they re-manifest ... all of their components regroup, but with Zorg-type metabolisms and Zorg assets, so they actually re-manifest as vegan vampires and they can go to Zorg and have a new life and they've got eternal life. So, vegan vampires come from Zorg,

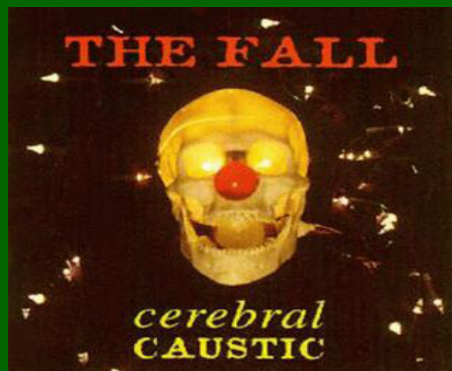


which, incidentally, is 38-billion-and-three-second light years away, approximately, and they come down to Earth to study the goings on of the human condition and they have to take it back to their leaders. It's a little bit of a cliché of alien films, but what people are getting, they're getting an alien movie, they're getting a vampire movie and they're getting a musical! And, they can edit the film, you know! A new type of hybrid Horror flick, I suppose! We've had an offer from Troma [Entertainment], actually. They are the biggest horror distributors in the world, I think, so we might be going forward with that, but first and foremost, we're going with One Media iP at Pinewood [Studios] and we've got a fantastic six cinema deal thing and then we've got the album and the book and all sorts of little trinkets, like syringes! We've got all that coming out on Gonzo [Multi]Media, the label of people like Rick Wakeman; The Fall; the guys from Yes and strangely, Donny Osmond's and Andy Williams' back catalogues! So, it's a strange label, but a brilliant label! But, as I was going to



say, our YouTube channel was taken down because of the needles! They thought we were making an anti-vax statement, but we had made the film prior to that, so any reference to needles pertain only to 'Vegan Vampires ...'!

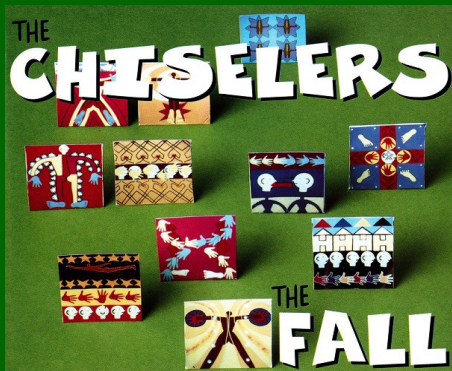
Your career, which began back in the '70s could best be described as eclectic, having taken in not only performing in bands such as Hiding in the Tall Grass (two members of which went on to join Roger Waters' band) and The Stemz with various ex-Fall members since the age of ten, but also music production for names such as Toyah ('Dreamchild', 1994, on which you are also credited as co-writer); Kim Fowley ('Let the Madness In', 1995 and 'The Trip of a Lifetime', 1998, both of which you were also credited as co-writer on, as well as his 1996 album with BMX Bandits, 'Theme Park' and the pairing's 1997 live album, 'Hidden Agenda at the 13th Note'); The Fall ('Cerebral Caustic', 1995 and 'The Light User Syndrome', 1996 and also



credited as co-writer on the 1996 non-album single ‘The Chisellers’ / ‘Chilinish’; Wishbone Ash (‘Live - Timeline’, 1997; ‘Trance visionary’, 1998 and ‘Psychic Terrorism’, 1999, the latter of which you were credited as co-writer), amongst many others, as well as co-writing Ian Brown’s ‘Golden Gaze’, from his 1999 album ‘Golden Greats’ and remixing the likes of The Specials; The Selecter; Dennis Brown; Gregory Isaacs; The Pioneers; The Melodians; Desmond Dekker and Bob Marley and the Wailers; acting in and writing for many a theatre and TV production and even writing for some of the greatest comedians the world has ever seen, including Rik Mayall; Phil Cool; Frankie Howerd; Jim Bowen; Anita Harris and Bobby Davro. Before we talk more about all that, where, when and how did this incredible and massively varied career all start for you?

I was six years old and I couldn’t sleep at night, because I was convinced there was another world living at the bottom

of the bed, so I thought I would write about it. I looked at the bottom of the bed and I was sure that I saw a little guy called Sammy Socket, but I also saw a character once, when I was six called Body Green, so I wrote that and I rekindled that [as ‘The Tale of Body Green’] for [BBC] Radio 1 and Radio 2 when I was eighteen [in 1980] and wrote and co-starred alongside Tony Blackburn; Keith Chegwin and Maggie Philbin in ‘Bill Wonder’ [BBC Radio 2] and other characters like that, I revisited when I got to write the Grimm’s fairy tales later in life for Rik Mayall [‘Short Tails and Tall Stories’ would prove to be Mayall’s final voiceover job before his passing in June 2014. The series of audiobooks was released in October 2015], which got awards and stuff like that. So, my career started there and I was a bit of a difficult kid at school because of my restlessness, I almost had artistic restlessness, and when I was ten, I started to put my music to the rhyming couplets that I’d written for these children’s tales and I thought ‘well, why don’t I be in a band doing this?’



and the flavour of the month at that point in time was Glam Rock, so I had a band called Flame when I was ten and I was in The Vain Hedgehogs at thirteen and I was always absent from school because I couldn't find where the school was! I couldn't find it! I was accused of absconding, but actually, I couldn't find it! But, I was apparently a bit hyperactive and apparently naughty, but, on reflection, that was because I was very scatty. I continued to be scatty, but I do have a little bit of a photographic memory and definitely an audiographic memory. I can shock people! I can be half-cut and remember quite a lot of things, like apropos conversations and stuff like that ... 'This is what you said!' So, then, when I got to a specific age, I was at, let's just say, 'a naughty boys' school'! So, I was in 'naughty boys' school', where I convinced the chap who was running it that if let me audition for stage school and I get in, guess what? This would be construed as progressive! And I thought, 'hhhhmmm, I quite like that!' And, in the interim period, I wrote to three

drama schools suggesting that they would be perceived as progressive if they would allow a naughty young boy like me into their institution and I was allowed to go and audition and they'd read these things and I went and they said, 'Do some Shakespeare' ... 'O for the muse of fire, that would ascend, The brightest heaven of invention ...' [Prologue to 'Henry V', c.1599], but I remixed that with the modern and I did it in a comedic way. I thought 'what I'll do, I'll put some comedy in' and I got in and it changed my life and during that, I was restless again, that's when I started writing for The Tony Blackburn Show [BBC Radio 1] and then I got the job, you see, writing for the BBC, writing [and presenting] for 'Primary Science' [BBC2] and hey, ironically, they sent me on assignment, or an assignment, to Oxford to learn the primary science curriculum and I felt that at the Oxford Union Debating Society, I cut my teeth in being able to articulate ideas and being able to articulate ideas drew me to production. I was performing in a lot of plays and I was performing in a lot of bands, but I



thought that my skill-set could actually include other things as well and I still thoroughly enjoy that. I've been working on my second Fuzzbox album to date and I've been working with John Otway recently, and a little bit of a twist, I'm doing audiobooks with him. I said, 'Look, John, you're absolutely amazing in the film, 'Vegan Vampires from Zorg' ...' So, that's why I'm wide and varied, because as I was acting, I helped write and came to the attention of the BBC and from there, I learnt I could do the Oxford Union bit and learnt more about putting things together, you know, and being able to communicate with people. The stuff that I write is very light in one way and very dark in another. You know, its comparable to, as I mentioned earlier, Ian Dury was able to deliver some very dark themes, but he had a lightness of touch. Now, The Psychedelic Furs, they were a good example of somebody [Richard Butler] who was not just an ordinary lyricist, he was in the kind of Harold Pinter / Samuel Beckett realm. It is surprising he hasn't acted, but there again, look at him, he can paint so

well, so coming back to this thing of it's good to diversify. And Toyah Willcox, I wrote and produced for her [two tracks, 'Now and Then' and 'Out of the Blue', for her 1994 album 'Dreamchild'] and she's done 'Teletubbies' [as narrator on titles and credits, BBC, 1997-2001] and she's done the Derek Jarman film, 'Jubilee' [1978], so she's done everything from 'Teletubbies' to Shakespeare and Derek Jarman, so it's all so diverse and from 'Sheep Farming in Barnet' [1980] to the sort of electronic rhythms of 'Dreamchild'. I think diversity is key if you want to have an expansive career and mean something, you know. And, pantomime, I've written a lot of pantomime. Pantomime is quite dark and there's harlequins and comedians and all of these things fascinate me, but what like to do is have this vast cauldron and throw everything into the cauldron and stir it up. And the great thing about 'Vegan Vampires from Zorg' is it is the first time ever, Alice, EVER, that I've managed to use all three of my skill sets! I get to bake that layer cake, if you like and it is the first



time outside of the realms of children's TV that I've been able to do that. It's not got theatrical music as such, it's kind of Hardcore Punk, Metal and just to make trouble, we've got Wishbone Ash in it as well, Prog Rockers! I particularly like producing and writing for female artists. I love Hazel O'Connor; We've Got a Fuzzbox ...; Toyah and my favourite, along with Fuzzbox of course, Melanie Williams, who I have to say, along with Peter Hook, sounds like she has got a smash hit in the bag! We've covered the Sweet's 'Healer' from the 'Give Us a Wink' [1976] album. But we did a whole album with Melanie and she's known for being part of Peter Hook's Hacienda Classical, but she's showing her Punky, Industrial side in the tracks that she's scored, or co-scored, with me and I just have a special fondness for working with females and, ostensibly, solo. Of course I love working with male bands as well, but ... I don't know, there's something about males working with females, females working with males. One seems to get more respect! [Laughs].

You have also produced and co-written with some true characters. For instance, you moved from Kim Fowley to Mark E Smith in that mid-'90s period. What was it like being in the studio with these people who were known for should we say, their eccentricities, shall we say?

Well, I was a fish out of water to some extent, because all these people who people were of the opinion that they were off the wall seemed normal to me! [Laughs]. Kim Fowley was very controversial. He came over because my band, Hiding in the Tall Grass, we were signed to a fairly major company [Sanctuary Music] ... I won't go into it because it was a hassle ... and he came over to do that [produce the band] and we split the band up and he stayed on my sofa and he had thousands of pounds in his bum bag and we saw he had a gun under his bed and the bed was the first I ever bought. We kind of split the band up by default and I did indeed end up producing two Kim Fowley albums ['Let the Madness In', 1995 and 'Trip of a Lifetime', 1998],



so he turned from producer to the produced, but he was really difficult actually and he used to say, 'Pass me one of those tapes from my dream cupboard!' He had like this cupboard that I had gifted him and the dream cupboard was some demos that were submitted by other people and he would take other peoples' work and just chuck a vocal over the top! But, when he had left, I replaced it with something original, because it was plagiarising somebody else's work, especially an artist he may have passed on [laughs]. Mark E [Smith] was great, loved him! I mean, just really creative! I did two albums [for The Fall]. The first was 'Cerebral Caustic' [1995]. He was late to the studio and appeared not to have written any songs! I hadn't been sent any songs anyway and we literally had twelve days to kind of conjure up this album and it did initially bomb! It got to number 67 in the charts. They'd had 'The Infotainment Scan' [1993], which had charted at number nine [and 1994's 'Middle Class Revolt', which had peaked at 48] and I thought 'well, that's me out then, isn't it?!' But, no, I got



the next album! He wasn't interested in chart positions and I got the next album, which was 'The Light User Syndrome' [1996] and that album, I said I wanted six weeks and prior to the six weeks recording, I want rehearsals and it became a kind of clean sounding album, but it got them respectfully back in the charts [#54] and the single, 'The Chiselers' [1995] that came off it charted at number 60 and got to number two on the Indie Chart, when that meant something! We did that at Trojan Records, but especially for him [Smith], they resurrected ELO's label, Jet Records and put it out on vinyl and how happy were we to see this iconic Jet logo! So, then, those two albums were bolted together and called 'Northern Attitude [- An Alternative Selection', 1998]. And I was living in Los Angeles for a while and I swear to God, I remember I thought I'd fallen out with Mark, I remember it ... there had a been a bit of push and shove, you know ... but, I came back, bumped into Mark and he was just so hospitable, because he was a really nice guy actually! Oh my God, I could tell you



Mike with Simon Wolstencroft

some amazing things he did for people, but you don't want to know, because it would ruin his grouchy image! But, yeah, I just thought The Fall had that most impressive sort of Agit-Pop, sort of Mancunian sound and it was never about mic-ing the drums up, you know, with twenty-five microphones, Mark only wanted two mics when I worked with him! There were two drummers, Simon Wolstencroft and Karl Burns and I consider Karl Burns, Simon Wolstencroft, Steve Hanley, Brix Smith, Dave Bush and Craig Scanlon to be the classic line-up. I have to say that Simon Wolstencroft was the standout drummer and went on, of course, to work with another character, Ian Brown, because he was the drummer for Ian Brown [on 'Golden Greats', 1999], so Simon is the link between all of those bands. He came us, so when you're saying 'How did I get to work with all these different artists?', you very often have a link there and Simon Wolstencroft is that guy. He also, incidentally, found me my flat! And he was going to be the best man at my wedding, but I had to



cancel. But, yeah, I moved to Manchester and I'm in Media City in Salford. It's just a lovely hub of the entertainment and arts industries and it's like being back at that stage school! [Laughs].

Around this time, you also became heavily involved in the Drum'n'Bass world and, along with a team of crack DJs, produced twenty-seven Drum'n'Bass albums, including huge sellers such as 'Drum'n'Bass Mania (The Junglist Selection)' (1997) and 'Drum'n'Bass Frenzy' (1997) for Demon Records; 'The Jungle Collection' for the QED label (1998); 'Drum'n'Bass Invasion' for Universal Records (1998) and 'United Flava of Drum 'n' Bass: Junglist Jazz Collection' for Intrinsic / Pinnacle (1998). How did you come to be involved in the Drum'n'Bass genre and what was it about Drum'n'Bass that made you want to work so heavily with that style of music?

I was at Trojan [Records] and realised



that Dub Reggae was the perfect tempo for a double time beat and the head of A&R came to me one day and he said, 'Would you like to create Trojan Jungle? I heard you listen to this Jungle stuff and heard you smashing it with the engineers' and they just gave me the Trojan catalogue and they said, 'Use any of these tracks to create a series of [Jungle remixes]' Gregory Isaacs? Who's going to turn that down?! Dennis Brown? Who's going to turn it down?! Dave and Ansell Collins? Who's going to turn it down?! I made the first one and it did really well. I think it did about 74,000 [sales], 'Trojan Jungle Volume 1' [1996] and then 'Volume 2' [1997] didn't do quite as well, but then they repackaged them as a double album. And whilst I was working for Trojan imprints ... I was freelance anyway ... I went to Demon Records and all these different labels and I said, 'Would you want me to look at your catalogue?' and I just liked the idea of playing with BPMs and I also did some Speed Garage, which was, at its most base, sped-up Disco, but with heavy loops. I didn't enjoy that as

much, because it wasn't as organic ... it wasn't as organic as the way that I got into Jungle. After twenty-seven [Drum'n'Bass] albums, I bailed out, because it was starting to sound stale. When I hear Drum'n'Bass now, there are people doing it far better than me now. I've got my sleeves rolled up, I've gone New Wave, I've gone Punk, I've gone Industrial, but I'm also working with acoustic artists like Adam Masterson as well, very tranquil sort of stuff. I write on acoustic and I love Nick Drake and I like Cat Stevens and Simon & Garfunkel. They provide a haven for me after I've been on a really heavy night with my ears bleeding! So, what I do is, I dim my lights at home, I pour myself a beautiful glass of wine and I sit back, put my feet up and listen to the tranquil moments of Simon & Garfunkel, or Nick Drake, or Donovan ... and do you know what? Even John Denver and stuff like that, because musical snobbery is not where I'm at, at all! I like all of that kind of stuff, it's a little haven for me. I avidly go to gigs and I love going to see new bands. It's very disappointing that I can't do



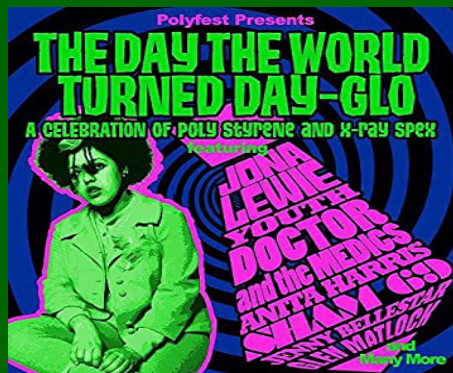
anything with them, but I like to go to these raw, edgy nights in Manchester. I've kind of like rediscovered Punk again, because there's a new Punk cycle and a new sound to Punk. At Rebellion, I could not believe the new artists' stage [Introducing] and there is just such a vast array of artists out there. They're sixteen to twenty-four and they're providing some vital music and I just wish I could get involved with it, but there are people who are better at breaking bands than me. Don't get me wrong, I do work with new bands. There's the band called Kavanagh who are in the movie ['Vegan Vampires from Zorg'] with the young guy, Dave [Emmons] who witnessed the axe murder. I've produced a bunch of stuff and they're in the film and I've also worked with Fat White Family and I'm trying to get Kavanagh a support slot with them. So, maybe I will get involved with new bands, you never know! I still try, you know! And I have been working with Neville Staple [The Specials, Fun Boy Three, et al] and he's an amazing guy! He's taught me a lot about producing

Reggae actually! He's amazing! He's a very nurturing guy. He's nurtured me since 1996 when I went to Trojan Records. With Neville ... well, I got production credits on The Specials, because on 'The Jungle Series', I remixed 'Too Much Too Young' ['The Specials', 1979]; 'Gangsters' [1979] and 'Concrete Jungle' ['The Specials']! And, Roddy Radiation [The Specials' guitarist], I had an amazing experience with him over lockdown [as part of From The Specials Featuring Neville Staple and Christine 'Sugary' Staple]. But, through The Specials signing to Trojan, I did those three iconic records, the remixed versions, but that was with Terry Hall, and somehow, I got chatting with Neville in the corridors and he wanted to do some solo Reggae type stuff, but The Specials reformed with their classic line-up, apart from Jerry Dammers, which I think was a little bit disgraceful, but nothing to do with Neville. But, they were absolutely amazing and when that consortium split into two [The Specials and From the Specials], obviously, I went with Neville, because he's a dear friend and



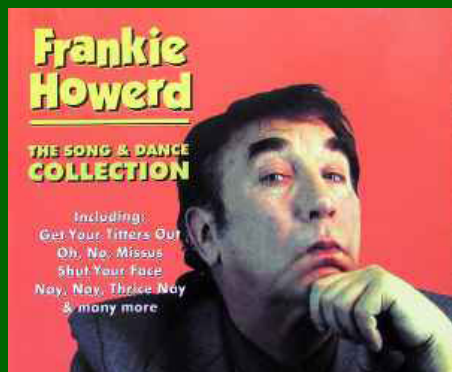
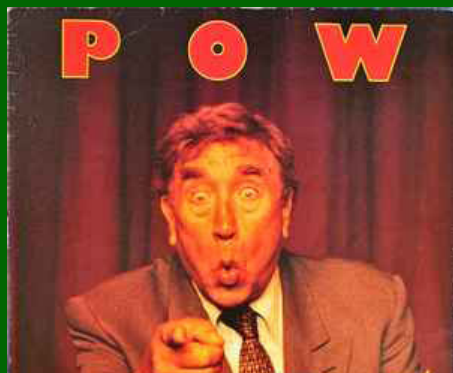
so is his wife, Christine ‘Sugary’ Staple. But, with the other line-up [The Specials], they’re great! There are the three core members [Terry Hall, Horace Panter and Lynval Golding], they’re great! They’ve got another guy doing Neville’s bits and he’s very good, but with Neville, he’s got a bit of a twist, because he’s got a female vocalist, Christine ‘Sugary’ Staple, who, you know, at first, came in for some flack, but stood her ground and has reshaped the whole thing and I’ve taken advice from her in respect to the job I’m currently doing with The Blockheads, because people will always compare and you’re never going to win, but she had her flack at the beginning, but now, people not only love her, but know her as ‘the princess of Ska’ now! And that [From the Specials] show ROCKED! Oh my God, it’s incredible, but you don’t just get a bunch of Special songs, you get the Fun Boy Three ones thrown in and all sorts! They are incredible and what I say is, ‘They’ve got more original members than the other lot!’

As well as your new position as the



frontman of The Blockheads, your involvement in the Punk world has also included preserving the memory of one of its most incredible figures by, alongside Pete Booker, producing the 2014 tribute album ‘Polyfest Presents ... The Day the World Turned Day-Glo: A Celebration of Poly Styrene & X-Ray Spex’, which featured live recordings from the first Polyfest, held at The Half Moon in Putney on the 4th of October 2013.

I stayed with Polyfest for seven years and it was getting quite a reputation before lockdown. She’s amazing, see, inspirational to me! I first met Poly when I was working at Trojan Records in the mid-nineties, where Poly was working on a separate project [her second solo album, ‘Conscious Consumer’, 1995], and I said to her, ‘Look, one of my favourite tracks is ‘The Day the World Turned Day-Glo’ [‘Germ Free Adolescents’, 1978]’ and she said, ‘Should I tell you what that song’s about? When I was at King’s Road on a market stall [on Beaufort Market], all I had was a little table and



I was selling little DIY Punk gifts, you know, made with marker pen and all that' and she said, 'It was just near from Malcolm MacLaren's Sex shop and over to the left of that was a guy, like a cowboy, going, 'Come and get your day-glo ties, two for the price of one! Come and get your day-glo ties!' and they were these day-glo ties with fairy lights, which I liked, and a whole bunch of people who had bought these, came back at the end of the day and they were all angry and they said 'The Lights have gone off on my day-glo tie!' and he said, 'What did you expect? They're day-glo ties, they only glow by day!' And the guy ran off and she had an idea for a song and she went into a Wimpy bar and wrote this song called 'The Day the World Turned Day-Glo'! And that appealed to me. If you think about how she opened the door for so many individuals ... she even put braces ON her teeth, whereas most Pop stars would take them off! But, she was doing something for the then disenfranchised youth and something for young girls, you know, the lonely girl; the 'Cockney reject'; the person

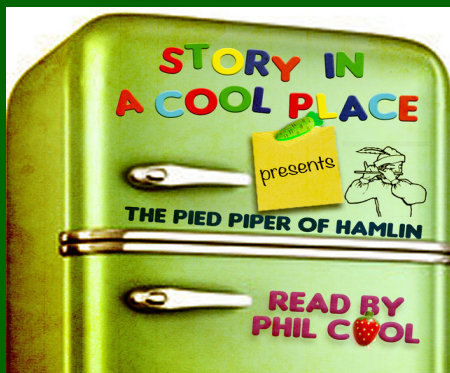
that didn't stand out from the crowd and suddenly, the girl next door could become the extraordinary girl next door! And that's why I love all of these strong, strong characters. But, you always find that there's always a little soft side too, you know. I had my first encounter with her [Poly Styrene] when I was seventeen years old when everybody was pogoing, the one-dimensional upwards dance that they all did so they could spit at their idol! Now, in Cheltenham, we did the pogo without the gobbing bit and she must have been so used to being gobbled at that she whacked over the head with her handbag! And I'm at school or outside the school going, 'Then, I got whacked over the head by Poly Styrene's handbag! I'm not going to wash my hair for weeks!' It was a very soft handbag, it must have had wool in it and very soft inside! [Laughs]. I could tell you the Hazel [O'Connor] story? You want to hear the Hazel one, do you?

Oh, go on then!



[Laughs] I better be careful how I word this! So, I rocked up at Hazel O'Connor's place [to work on 'Ignite'] and, at the time, I'd not met her before. I had a couple of cars full of equipment and I knocked on the door and she answered the door and she was like, 'What's that in your hand?' and I said, 'Oh, it's a chicken sandwich' and she went, 'You don't need to eat that, that's meat!' And I thought 'okay!' 'Get rid of it, I'll pretend I didn't see that!' And she closed the door, waited until she couldn't see me and I threw it over the fence, right? And she came back and she said, 'Good that's gone!' Anyway, she made us all a vegetarian dish and when they went outside for a little break on the veranda, I hadn't eaten her veggie food, but I'd snuck in some sandwiches, but I'd put the food on top of the lampshade. I balanced it on there, so it didn't look rude that I hadn't eaten her food and a couple of days later, it started to attract insects and allegedly, infiltrated the lampshade and she went, 'Who did this? Who put that up there?! I can't even kill those creatures because of my [Hare] Krishna

beliefs! It was you, wasn't it Mike?' And I said 'No, definitely not!' But, she went to the next person, which was my partner at the time, and she said, 'It was you then, wasn't it' and my partner said, 'No, it wasn't me!' ... 'Which brings me back to my first suspect! It was you, wasn't it Mike?' I went, 'Yeah, it was, but I've got a really, really good explanation' and she said, 'This had better be good Mike!' I said, 'Okay, I did it because your manager told me he wanted a really, really moody album, so I was conjuring up an angsty atmosphere!' And she went, 'I'm just going to phone my manager' and the manager confirmed it! And she went, 'Right, Mike, Mike, all is forgiven, group hug, this is brilliant! Fantastic!' and it was bear hugs all round after that! [Laughs]. And then, okay, a very famous star appeared a day later and allegedly, it was Moya Brennan [Clannad], right? And she said to Hazel, 'Look, somebody's thrown this sandwich over my fence. We're vegan, we're vegetarians, what's going on?!' And I said, 'Oh, sorry about that, blah, blah, blah' and Hazel

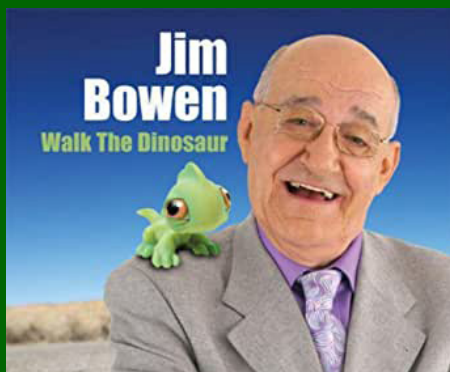
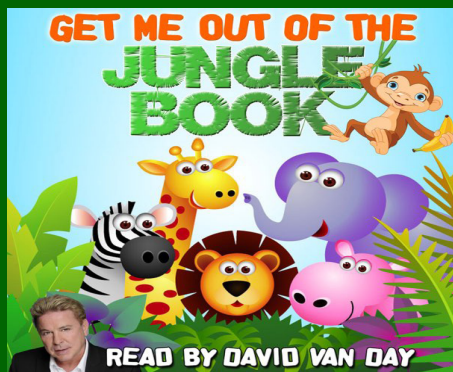


went, ‘Oh no, no, no, that will just be my conjuring up a moody atmosphere! Angst ridden, I believe!’ and I ended up doing a track with Moya Brennan and Hazel O’Connor and it was called ‘Hidden’ [‘Hidden Heart’, 2005].

Finally, you have worked with such legends of comedy as Frankie Howerd; Rik Mayall; Phil Cool; Jim Bowen; Anita Harris and Bobby Davro. Was working with all those amazing comedians something of a dream come true for you?

Yes, definitely! I started off with Frankie Howerd and somebody played me in the Frankie Howerd film [‘Rather You Than Me’, 2008]! I couldn’t believe it! I come on at the end and say, ‘Hey, Frank, Frank, we’ve got you on ‘The Word’ [Bennett was responsible for Howerd appearing on Channel 4’s ‘The Word’ in 1991, on which he was interviewed by Terry Christian and performed vocals on a Techno track entitled ‘Oo No Missus’]! Frankie Howerd was ... each one was completely different, but Frankie

Howerd ... I was trained by the best, Galton and Simpson, and basically, it was a case of assembling catchphrases and it was explained to me that, originally, with things like ‘Oo-er!’, those things were pontificating and thinking ‘what’s the next line?’ and were worked into the framework of this artist and I was writing comedic songs [following Howerd’s appearance on ‘The Word’, ‘Oo No Missus’ was released as a single in the same year and in 1998, six years after Howerd’s death, Bennett produced the compilation ‘The Song & Dance Collection’], but always bring in his famous punctuation technique and, you know, every pause or ad-lib was thought out to repeat. Each one was different. With Rik Mayall, I wrote him the Grimm’s fairy tales, which for the most of it were animated, but it was part of a series of six I did for Rik Mayall [‘Short Tails and Tall Stories’, 2015]. He would turn up word perfect and rant them down the microphone with great rapidity and then he would and become slow and thoughtful and then he revved the pace up and it was



really getting into the brain of the actual artist and you studied their unique ways. Bobby Davro, for instance, was all about mimicry and was all about impersonations, so I wrote '[The Adventures of] Alice in Wonderland' ['Bedtime Stories', 2017] and strangely enough, he did imitations of all the other people in the series, which I thought was fun! And Anita Harris, great comedienne, great actress, what a delight, what a beautiful woman! I wrote her a one woman show version of 'Cinderella' ['Bedtime Stories', 2018] where she played all the characters! Loved doing that! Phil Cool, okay, that one ['Stories in a Cool Place', 2013] went a bit pear-shaped and it was due to ... I won't blame anybody, it wasn't for one reason. One Media, Pinewood, I do a lot of stuff for them, including 'Vegan Vampires ...', they've taken it on. Phil Cool was going for another set-up and it was time, I couldn't get as immersed into it, because the arrangements went wrong. I'm very precise about punctuality, time and those sorts of things. He [Cool] was absolutely

brilliant, he was always on time, but I didn't strike the same chord with that one off as opposed to doing a series, a quickfire series ... 'Oh wow, who have we got next month? We've got that incredible artist!' David Van Day [Guys 'n' Dolls / Dollar / two '90s and 2000s line-ups of Bucks Fizz], that's who I did a comic vehicle for ['Get Me Out of the Jungle Book', 2015]! He'd come out of the jungle ['I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!', ITV, 2008] and because he'd been in the jungle and I thought he'd won, but actually ... he told me he did! ... But, he came second [he actually came fourth], so somebody said to me at One Media iP, 'Can you do a script for David? He's just come out of the jungle' and I said, 'Well, why don't we remix 'The Jungle Book' [Rudyard Kipling, 1894] with 'I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!' Why don't we remix them, so we can have all the characters from 'The Jungle Book', but we'll put them in the context of '... Get Me Out of Here!' So, I had a two-headed beast called 'Anton Dec' and they [adopts Geordie accent] talked like that, 'Why

aye, man!’ in unison and David Van Day played a childlike version of his alter ego, who is very selfish and he got lost in the jungle and it’s all about him finding himself and having a happy, tranquil ending. He’s nasty to everyone and he nearly got eaten by Anton Dec. So, again, it’s dipping into something real of that character, or getting into their rhythm, as they say and just having the faith to go on in, write it, direct it, produce the backing tracks and steer it to success. So, yeah, you know, so, those things often sort of start off as a talking book and then become a TV series, but I just think that within the confines of ridiculousness and with the confines of light entertainment, you can actually be really true to the artist and really true to the storyline. However ridiculous, you have to really believe in it, in my opinion. You know, you’ve got to really believe in it and it took me from producing to directing and yeah, I was awestruck ... yes, I was, I was awestruck [laughs] and I landed not one, but a whole series of them on the trot and it was just such a joy and something away from heavy Punk music and Industrial music and Ska and Hard Rock and Metal. As I say, I like my solitary moments. I love listening to comedy and comedians. And Jim Bowen! I created a comedy vehicle for Jim Bowen, where I had to do some crazy antics and messing around with ‘everybody walk the dinosaur’ [Was Not Was ‘Walk the Dinosaur’, 1987, ‘What’s Up Dog?’, 1988] and that was released as a single [in 2008]. And I’ve

done stuff for ‘Text Santa’ [ITV, 2011-2015] and I’ve written a lot of children’s plays and I had one run in the West End for six weeks, ‘Safety in Numbers’, which taught mathematics and ‘Starstruck’, or ‘It’s All in the Stars’, as they called it, which taught astronomy and that came from my assignment course at Oxford and it was just lightening it up and making a comic vehicle out of it, so children were coerced into embracing the entertainment, but in the entertainment, they were also getting the primary science curriculum. And yeah, this is the stuff I love talking about. I’m very passionate about the writing more than anything, because with the scriptwriting, there’s a musical element to it with me, because I’ll always put music in there. ‘Vegan Vampires ...’ is punctuated by it, you know, song after song after song, you know.

Thank you for a wonderful interview, it has been so lovely to talk to you! We wish you all the best in your new position as lead vocalist of The Blockheads and, of course, with ‘Vegan Vampires from Zorg’, and for the future.

*‘Vegan Vampires from Zorg’
premieres on the 31st of October
at Victoria Vaults in York,
with a preview on the 29th.*

**[www.mikebennett
writerproducer.com](http://www.mikebennettwriterproducer.com)**