

## OUTBAR BLOG CHRONOLOGICALLY ORDERED

### PART 1 December 06

Hi to whoever finds this space. My name is James Hesford (I used to be called David Hughes) I now use James (my second name and my fathers first name and Hesford - the name of my Nanny {grandmother} who I loved dearly). In many ways Outbar was the reason I changed my name both because of good and bad memories. During the time of running this band I made many friends but probably more enemies - sometimes my fault and sometimes not. Will explain later.

In 1980 I won the Young Jazz Musician of the Year award. I was/am a dedicated musician - practice faithfully everyday and true to my roots of Jazz Funk Soul Blues. After the award it suddenly occurred to me how much I hated the British Jazz Scene. Don't get me wrong - there were/are brilliant musicians here but most people were at that time trying to sound like Americans. All bass players sounded like Jaco - all guitarist sounded like Pat Metheny or whoever was the current American Favorite etc etc. also the if figured out it would take me 4 years to get my prize money (dished out as gigging subsidy) if I stayed here as you were lucky if you got £50 a gig. So I packed my bags and went to live in New York - Down town Manhattan - Luckily got a job working for Bob Lennonx Band and lived in NY and toured Germany for about 2 years so I could afford to rent downtown sublets.

Punk was getting big in New York and I joined a couple of projects playing a mixture of punk and free jazz. I loved it - such great energy - talking to musicians who's first sentence was "I'm looking for my own voice" so inspired me.

I started to think about composing music about what I was learning and feeling - I met John Leckie (an old friend)- he was in town producing a band and we met up and spent a few days together - listening to music and talking, going out to clubs etc. John had just been given as much free time as he wanted at Abbey Road Studios in London (as long as it was in down time) and he could choose to record any project he wanted. The only condition was that EMI got first option. He asked me if I would like to start a project and come back and record it. I said yes and made plans to move back to London.

When I got back I hooked up with my friend Andy Herbert (great bass player) - first of all to make some money playing Jazz Standards anywhere - which we did - but also to help me form Outbar Squeek - it was Andy who chose the name - he saw it on a notice board of a pig farm.

I started to hate playing standards especially in bars and restaurants and felt a degree of urgency to get this band together.

For some reason I started to write lyrics - songs of a kind - which I juxtaposed with tunes with quite weird harmonies. (I love Hindemith/Bartok/Kodaly - I have made a living as a composer, writing

music based on my misunderstanding of their concepts). I had never written or even liked songs - I like instrumental music - I like the abstract - words make things too literal for me - I don't know why but I felt a strong need to do it. I started singing (bloody hell) or rather shouting monotonely. Disco Eddy was my first song - ever! It pissed me off when people thought it was about Discos but it was about some guy I saw on Brighton Beach NYC. He was ranting and raving - he called himself Disco Eddy and kept saying "got the get me some respect round here" - he kept doing silly things to impress people like blindfolding himself and jumping over sand castles. To me he represented what the down side of our society has become - about impressing people - style over substance - the total importance of fame - celebrity culture - worth as a human being directly in ratio to the degree of fame - also he was paying the price for not succeeding - he was what Americans call a bum.

## PART 2 Jan 07

I was back in England playing jazz standards with Andy in bars and restaurants. As I said before - It became a matter of urgency to get Outbar together as playing in these places was really cramping my style. If you stretch out too much the people at the nearest table get over exited and start throwing up, so you have to be laid back which is something that doesn't come naturally to me or Andy.

We started jamming with Boris and Tim Sanders. Boris (backbeat Boris) was/is a great drummer but he lacked interest in the swing thing. Tim was/is amazing. He was really into the free style but also had space for tight ensemble playing and he loved the concept. Boris went off to join the Thompson Twins and later the Cure so we started looking for someone else.

One of the nicest gigs we played was a place called Grapes at the Angel in Islington. The guy who ran it was a guy called Stewart who in his youth played trumpet in the big bands. He would let us play what and how we wanted and encouraged us to stretch out. Someone once complained that the band was too loud so he told them shut up or leave. After a few weeks of playing there we brought in drummers and horn players to form a quartets and one night Richard Marchangelo turned up to play kit with us. He had an amazing swing feel but could also play tight hard funk and rock out. We jammed with him and he immediately joined the band.

I mention the Grapes because what started off as a restaurant and piano bar finished up as a jazz club and provided us with a living and a space to get our bebop chops together. We were doing two nights a week and we would go and jam there on our nights off – every musician in town gigged Grapes during this period. Also It was here (thanks to Stewart) that Outbar first played a short set.

We still needed another brass player for the section so I asked Dave Chambers (who had played with us at Grapes) to come along. Dave is a great player with a huge sound – disciple of Coltrane - but he had no interest in section playing so I had to sack him. I think he was very relieved and there

were no hard feelings – we are still good friends today and he is playing as great as he ever did.

We played with quite a few brass players but no one fitted the bill until we met Barbara Snow who had just left the Royal College of Music. She was out there playing on the feminist circuit with various women bands and was up for getting her jazz chops together and doing the non-classical thing. We contacted her and she came along to play. Tim and Barbara got on really well so she got the job. They became a very tight section and put in many hours of hard work tightening up the heads.

So, finally we had a band that could play the music with conviction. I had been composing relentlessly, pushed by John Leckie who was keen to start recording the project in Abbey Road, and we had more than enough material for an album and a live set and a great band to make it work - Andy (Bass), Tim (saxophones) Richard (Drums) and Barbara (Trumpet) and Me (Guitar/monotone vocals)

### PART 3

So we had a band. There was a couple of things to do - 1. find some gigs  
2. start recording at Abbey Road with John. There was enough material to do both.

Recording at Abbey Road was really exciting. We would turn up quite late at night (because John had to work in "dead time") and record till morning. During that time a percussionist called Martin Ditcham, came down to do a session. He totally loved the music and joined the band immediately. He was just right - so quirky - the first thing he did was play squeaky rubber hammers on one track, which blew my head off. Everything he played was superbly tight. He later got really busy. First he went to America to do a Diana Ross Session - finished up doing all the percussion on the Stones album and Michael Whatusname from Steely Dan - Sade's album and live gigs - everyone wanted Martin, but not before doing loads of gigs with us. We used to joke that Martin had a new percussion instrument - a big bag of money.

As I mentioned before, I was getting very board with the jazz scene. Andy had a job doing the sound down the Rock Garden in Covent Garden. I used to get in free because I would tell the doorman I had come from the PA company to pay him his money. So, every Thursday night I would go down their - get a fizzy watered down larger and watch punk bands. There was so much energy coming off that stage - totally inspiring.

Anyway, the Rock Garden was one of the first gigs we did or maybe it was the Greyhound in Fulham but it was great. John came and taped it on his walkman thingy. We were very hot - more energy than a punk band but tight as hell and up for it. It was great doing the gigs but we hardly got paid anything. The Rock Garden paid about £20 - I found it a bit disrespectful to such great musicians playing in our band that they should get so little. People were lucky if they walked away with a fiver. These people were world class musician and they were willing to come out a play

for nothing. It's a great testimony to their spirit and I will be grateful for them forever. Having said that there wasn't much about that would stretch a musician that far and was that exciting and innovative to play.

We started to get a bit of a following but it was hard because we didn't seem to fit into any category - we weren't jazz, punk, or new wave. We looked like a 1940's big band and played Ornette Coleman type solos????? Big problem!!!!!! To tell you the truth I think most of our audience were musicians - non musicians in the audience called us the band that played out of tune where as musicians would call us the band that sounded like Hindemith on acid. You can see the problem?

## **PART 4 March 07**

So we had a great band. Half the audience were musicians - the gigs paid no money. I forgot to mention that although we had a great time working in Abbey Road with John, and produced some great stuff (of which I will be eternally grateful to John) EMI, who had the first option on signing us declined. We had no deal.

The gig situation got worse - we had been going for over a year - maybe two - can't remember, but it seemed like a lifetime. We played this gig in Hammersmith - We made £50 quid from the door and I shared it with the band. Then the guy who ran the gig presented me with a bill for a £100 for the hire of the PA. This was the beginning of pay to play policy. The future for us looked very bleak at this moment. It got even more depressing - me and Andy were not doing as many gigs because we were concentrating on Outbar so I was getting poor fast. I was in a lot of debt.

We were doing a gig in South London somewhere - some young guys asked us to do it for the door money. We turned up but the audience didn't and neither did the drummer Ricky. He was off doing a session for Chaz and Dave and it had run over. Eventually a few people turned up - one being a drummer - we played the gig to about 5 people with this drummer no one knew. He did a good job but it was at this point I decided to disband Outbar.

Ricky turned up while we were packing the gear away. I wasn't that mad for some reason. I had reconciled myself to the fact it was all over.

But as they say, it is always darkest before dawn.

## **PART 5 March 07**

Always Darkest Before Dawn. -- So I had had enough and decided I could not inflict these indignities (if there is such a word) on myself or these wonderful musicians anymore. It was time to disband the band and go back to playing Jazz standards. I remember I felt so depressed. I felt like I had been beaten up.

About a week later Richard rang saying that a couple of guys who he

worked with (Jim Prene and Geff Gurd) were interested in producing the band and wanted to try and make a single out of Disco Eddy. I had nothing to lose so I said yes.

The studio was just up the road from me. It was called Red Shop (because it was painted red and it was a shop) and was on Snt Pauls Road - a ten minute walk from my flat. Jim and Geff wanted a current sound and did a great job. They got Gina Foster in to do masses of thick backing vocals.

AS I'M WRITING THIS THE PICTURE OFF ME BOBBING AROUND WITH A GUITAR IS GETTING RIGHT ON MY TITS - BUT ITS THE ONLY PICTURE I HAVE OF THE BAND AND IS WAS IN THE BEGINNING SO ITS STAYING THERE.

Where was I - Gina - loads of backing vocal - "my name's Disco Eddy". They (Geff and Jim) wanted to thicken up the horn section so they said they asked two guys in to augment our great horn section - Roddy and Simon. Tim and Barbara had worked so hard making section parts sound tight and I suppose it had (quite rightly so) become his and her territory. Anyway Roddy and Simon and Tim and Barbara got on really well. It was like a match made in Heaven - love at first sight. Roddy and Simon really liked the music and the horn parts so they joined the band - we now had a four piece horn section and a backing singer (Gina) plus perc, drums, guitar, and bass. Everything sounded great and I got enthused again and started writing new stuff. One day (during a session at Red Shop) we were recording a tune called Myopia, Roddy and Simon brought down a singer called Eddie Reader. She and Gina did some backing vocals on it and it sounded great so Eddie joined the band too.

We now had a huge band - 4 horns - 4 rhythm section 2 backing vocals - 10 people. Bloody Hell! But - we had no deal and no gigs.

## **PART 6 April 07**

So OUTBAR PART SIX. As I said we had just done a track with Jim Preen and Geff Gurd producing and loads of people had joined the band. But we had no deal or gigs.

A couple of days later I get a phone call from some geezer who was down Red Shop recording studios and had heard some of our tapes. He offered me a publishing deal out of the blue.

From my experience of life, usually when this sort of thing happens its either a joke or some kind of scam to extort money out of me. As it happened this turned out to be true - the guy worked for Tritek - the publishing company that had signed Duran Duran. Duran Duran were far from my favorite band infact I couldn't stand the whole New Romantic thing. I thought it was wanky and to tell you the truth (apart from Howard Jones and Thomas Dolby), if I was omnipotent most powerful force in the universe and master of all I see before me, with a name like Zorkon or Mestopholese of the Outer Stratospheres, I would erase the 80's

completely from people's memories and imprison Margaret Thatcher in a perspexy pyramid thingy and send her flying off into the Universe for ever and eternity.

Sorry about that - just went off on one. Anyway what was I saying. Oh yes. It turned out to be true. The Guy from Tritek wanted to offer me a publishing deal and said if I came around to the office near Berwick Street the next day he would write me out a cheque for £3.000 - after I'd given him a blow job - JUST KIDDING! - It was £250 - JUST KIDDING! It was £3,000 and I didn't have to give him a blow job (unless I really wanted to)

Anyway what happened? The guy from Tritek was down Red Shop the day after we were with one of his bands and Jim was tidying up and was playing our track - Disco Eddy. The guy heard it and went ballistic and phoned me up - cool hey?

I went and signed the deal and got the cheque. I had some money! Wow!. Anyway - here is the scenario. The geezer (from Tritec) - I just remembered his name - it was Ian. Anyway, a year or so before Ian had taken DURAN DURAN tracks to Dave Ambrose of EMI and Dave signed them and they had lots of hits which helped Dave Ambrose's reputation grow (he was now called GOLDEN EARS in the Music Industry for having the site to sign DUREX DUREX). So - do you get my drift - Ian had a lot of swing with Dave who now had a lot of swing in EMI and could virtually sign anyone he wanted to. So - we took Disco Eddy to Dave and he signed the band.

The funny thing was that he had declined the band a year earlier and couldn't remember even meeting me.

So I had three grand (publishing) - The band got signed for £21,000 - not a great amount but we had some money which we used to subsidize gigs mainly - which meant everyone got paid for playing - If I remember it was decent money too and lasted quite a long time.

Position so far - We had a deal - we had some money - but there were problems - problems even worse than when we were poor.

## **PART 7 April 07**

HELLO AGAIN - PART SEVEN - GOT A DEAL - PUBLISHING AND RECORD COMPANY WOW! FEELING GOOD. A HOLIDAY FROM ABJECT POVERTY. SO WHAT ABOUT THE PROBLEMS

1. Problem Number One. Geff Gurd and Jim Prene did a really good job producing our track Disco Eddy- it sounded current and original. They did it for nothing - They were speculating. They were hoping that if we got a deal they would become the producers of our big album with a major record company. And why not - they were talented and original and for F.....s sake - they were kind and generous to have done that - Agree???

The first thing Dave Ambrose said to me was that he wanted a new producer and didn't want us to work with Geff or Jim. His words - "we needed someone more established". So I have to make a decision. Do I tell him to f... off and loose the deal or do I go along with that hoping that sometime in the future when the band has proved themselves I can choose Geff and Jim to produce the 2nd Album or something like that. So I go for the 2nd option. In retrospect I should have chosen the first one - at least I would have kept my self respect and a bit of honor but I didn't - I chose the second option - Sorry!.

2nd Problem - the guy Dave chose to produce us did have a track record - he had had hits but he also a little problem - a £100 quid a day smack habit with a £50 a day coke chaser habit.

The first day in the studio - I hated the guy. He had no ideas, He had no class - and he produced a pile of shit. He may have been OK for Durex Durex but not for us. I met Geff quite recently. He turned up to that session and told me that he went home crying because of what the guy had done to his track. Actually in reality it was my track so imagine how I felt.

3rd problem - photos - When you are in a major record company they want to take control of everything - even the way you look. I had an Idea for the record sleeve.

I wanted a 1940's bus interior lit through the windows with orange street lights. The band would all be wearing 40's suites. It would be moody - we would look like a bebop band on tour - we would be playing cards or sleeping or practicing - stuff that you do on a tour bus. So what did we get. We get a cardboard cut out of a greyhound bus with all the band hanging outside lit from face on - It looks like a wankers party and there's no mood or period lighting. Why do we go along with these things - Because its costing about £2,000 for the shoot and its already organized and when you get there it hard to have the balls to say "this is crap - f.... off this is not how I want the band to look" Plus you have six million record co. execs and stylist saying 'TRUST ME - WE CAN DO THIS AND THAT ETC'.

So - I have to finish now - I will sum up. Record Deal (Yes) New Photo(yes) A New Potential Hit Single (Yes)

#### THE REALITY.

1. No control over who produces us or how we sound.
2. No control over the way we look - We look awful and contrived - like a bad disco band
3. The track that sounded so cool when we did it in Abbey Road and again in Red Shop sounds like a pile of shit and EMI who imposed that w.....r upon us are not very pleased about it.

4. I lost two friends (Jim and Geff) who now hate me and think I am a traitor.

Anyway - IT GETS WORSE! PART EIGHT COMING SHORTLY. GOODNIGHT  
- JAMES X

## PART 8 May 07

Hi again. Part Eight. Have to get my bearings a bit. There was a bit of an argument at EMI over the single. Ian (from publishing) I think it was, complained to Dave Ambrose A&R about the producer of the single we were about to put out. Eventually Dave conceded and decided that we would use Geoff and Jim's version but it had to be remixed. We remixed it and even did a 12 inch version with wild guitar solos. The vibe was a bit tense - I suppose we all felt a little beaten up by EMI and the initial naive enthusiasm of a great band that was going take its music and ram it down the throat of the world was slightly dented by the harsh realities of mainstream music business.

So we had our music back but the record sleeve was still abysmal.

You would think that a major record label would be eager to promote the first single of a new band that they have recently signed. You would think that there would be radio pluggers and publicists waiting in readiness on the day your record is released to get radio and tv plays and interviews and reviews in magazines and newspaper - Unfortunately not. You see most big labels work on what they call the "Mud on the wall principle". They throw lots of balls of mud at a wall and some of it sticks but most of it doesn't. The odd bit of mud that sticks make up for the tons of mud that slips down into oblivion. They sign lots of bands, do as little as possible, and sit and wait for something to happen. The successful (lucky) bands get pushed - the slow moving ones get dropped.

So the week our track was released happen to coincide with David Bowie's greatest hits release or Kate Bush's birthday party or Durex Durex's ship sank, so we got no help with publicity and very little plugging. For some reason it didn't do too bad – I think we got in the top 100 which meant that we could make another single and start an album. God know how we did it. We had some press – good and some bad, without EMI's publicity department lifting a finger. Actually that's not quite right – someone did see one of our posters under the bridge in the Holloway Road.

Anyway that's what happened to Disco Eddy. Shame.

## PART 9 August 07

Alfia found this on the internet.

It was from some Christian folk musician (Boo Hewerdine) who once had a close encounter with Eddie Reader and has been dining out on the experience ever since (probably at Burger King). He wrote this in his

memoirs (which I am sure you are all familiar with).

"Richard played 'Graceland' the first Bible single and I waxed nostalgic about how it cost forty quid to record and that while we were mixing it, in a long disappeared London studio called Red Shop Recorders, Eddi came down the stairs. This was before she was in Fairground Attraction. At the time she was singing in a quite appalling group called Outbar Squeak."

I must say I sometimes have a problem with folk musicians, usually those who believe that because they have an average claw hammer picking technique which they execute ad-nauseam over a couple of triads and sing with their finger in their ear, they have somehow transcended the common mortal and created a new benchmark of virtuosity. Alfia points out that I sound a bit bitter and twisted (which is probably true) and that he is entitled to his opinion – which is also true – so I should shut up which is probably not true as I am at my most entertaining when I am expressing my f.....d up ness.

Actually some of my best friends are folk musicians and I have great respect for them as artists and sticking your finger in your ear is fine with me as long as you don't have a thorny stick shoved up your arse.

Anyway back to the blog. I suppose Boo had a point. Outbar did become quite awful I should say why.

After a period at EMI the head of A&R changed. They brought in an axe man to do a chopping job. Can't remember his name – I remember he had a beard and looked like the grim reaper but apart from that everything else about him is a bit blurry. The story goes that on his first day he asked to see all the record sleeves of the current artists (of which we were one) in the record company. If he didn't like the look of a sleeve he would throw it on the floor and say OUT! and tear up their contract He didn't listen to anything. When he got to our cover – which, as I said before, looked not even like a dog's dinner – more like dog poo, he threw it on the floor and said OUT! Dave was in the room with him at the time and came to our rescue and said we were making a new single, which featured Eddie and Gina, (Away from the Heat") and he should listen to it. He did listen to it and quite liked it. He then listened to our earlier stuff which sounded more like the music on myspace and asked to see me.

It was an horrible experience – when I walked into his office, it was like that last bit of Lord of the Rings where what's his name is trying to toss the ring back into the furnaces of thingy bob. This is what he said. - "Your band plays crap music. I am going to chuck you off the label and get one of my hench men to break your fingers. (He didn't really say that but it felt like he did). He then said – UNLESS, you start writing songs for Eddie.

Well you would think that that would be a good idea - having someone as talented as Eddie and Gina in the band without exploiting their great vocal sound would seem stupid but it would mean making changes conceptually and mentally. I was (am) a jazz musician and originally wanted Outbar to be a medium to look at new ways of playing. I had already made

compromises and we had come along way from the original concept of mixing "out" improvisation with funk and punk influences with Hindemithian horn lines. The happy days of playing extended solos in squat gigs in New York seemed far off. In the back of my head I was thinking that the odd compromise would eventually lead us to playing what we really wanted to play. (Naivety I suppose)

When Eddie first turned up – in Red Shop – she just joined the band. I didn't particularly want another woman singer, even though she was/is brilliant. I am also a realist (sometimes) and knew that she would be biding her time until she found something where she could truly express her talent and that Outbar was not the place for her to do it but her contribution was highly valued and respected. That was fine with me. I liked/like her very much – she could sing backing with us for a bit and then leave and there would be no hard feelings. I suppose that's why I get irritated when people write negative things about the band in connection with Eddie - like we were exploiting her and suppressing her creatively. We all knew the score and as far as I remember there were as many happy times as tough times. Perhaps at this time (after a year with EMI) we had all made compromises and none of us were doing what we really wanted to, but Outbar was providing a living, experience and exposure for ten people. We may not have been happy but we were not hungry.

I have to say this was new territory for me. I am at my most comfortable writing instrumental music. I also write words but not songs. I write stories. Putting words and music together was great with my mono tonal singing voice but vocal melody with lyrics mmmm!

So I started to write with Richard (the drummer). He had been around playing sessions and was a talent in his own right. He knew about pop music – what was current – what was good bad etc. and so he was my guide through this new frightening direction.

He was also had a much better business head than me and could see a situation worth exploiting to the max. We demoed some stuff and it was ok. Actually some of it was good - "When the bad men come" was very respectable (a loop from this single was used for the countdown music for the BBC 1 chart show for a couple of years and a rewritten version was used on a million pound budget advertisement for Sasson Leisure Wear) – but I have to admit some of it was far from being great. I am not good at collaboration because I feel that rather than it being a pooling of ideas it is more about compromise. Since then I have never collaborated with writing and never will.

Anyway – we went ahead with it. The attention was taken off the horn lines and on to the vocals which was a shame as the Kicks (Kick Horns) were really kickin and they were being used less and less. Andy (who was the original member after me) – (brilliant bass player) was used less and less as sampling technology was taking over most of our sessions especially in the rhythm section department. Even the guitar wasn't used that much. Also it was the day of the producer who programmed or played everything. The original band sound was lost and we had become just another 80's band looking for fame and fortune – so I suppose Boo

has a point even though its on the end of a stick and inserted into his rectum.

Anyway next bit coming up shortly.

## **PART TEN August 07**

Hi, I don't usually write as often as this but having just had a totally depressing message on myspace from Geoffrey Gurd (the guy who produced our released version of "Disco Eddy") saying that his record company is treating him exactly how EMI treated us, I feel obliged to carry on with the blog.

His success with his current project (which is far from mainstream) brought a ray of hope into a dark cavern of despair and disillusionment. His confirmation that the "sanitization for the purpose of easy categorization process (SFTPOECP)" is still alive and kickin in the "Majors" woke me from my day dream of green pastures filled with original musical concepts and raw energy and I am now back in a world full of boy bands, Spice Girls 2 and the f...king X Factor. Great!

Before I continue I would like to say that I am not a pessimist and I am very happy with what I am doing now ([www.jameshesford.com](http://www.jameshesford.com)) and writing this stuff is more about confirming that there is a life outside the mainstream rather than failure at dealing with the status quo.

So where were we! Oh yes – after a period with EMI we had turned from being a 10 piece live energy ensemble playing music influenced by Ornette Coleman, Hindermith, raw funk and driving punk into a 80's pop band with a girl singer (actually 2).

Our record sleeves were crap and I was now sporting an 80's swept back at the sides and floppy front with a blond streak haircut which looked like it defies gravity. EMI had paid for us all to go to some fancy hairdresser to style us a bit. We looked very current. (more current bun actually)

As I said before the band were beginning to feel a little uneasy with the situation (even though they had nice haircuts). The horns and the rhythm section were not being used as much in recording sessions. Producers were programming for us and we had little input into how the songs were mixed. The company would team us up with the favorite producers of the day and we were recording (or being recorded for) in the best studios in town – Maison Rouge, Wessex, Sahm East and West. With one set of producers, who did nothing but talk about football and snort coke all day, we managed to knock up a bill for £100,000 on three album tracks which sounded somewhere between Durex Durex and Haircut 100 which later got thrown out by the record company (Thank the Lord). Can you believe that even after all this I still believed that we could go back to playing what we really wanted to if we became successful. How dumb is that?

We were doing some telly and making videos and living the lifestyle but

the music was missing. Somehow we got teamed up with producer Derek Bramble who managed to make something half decent as a single (When the bad men come) and it was about to be released. We had great expectations as our new management team had promised that even if the EMI machinery didn't get behind the song they would and they had the power to get it exposed on the Radio and TV and get it into the shops all over the country. They were dealing with another group (can't remember their name) who had had quite a few top 10 singles and they seemed genuine enough although a bit 'show bizzy".

Up to now money hadn't been a problem. We had been paying ourselves from our advanced royalties and getting some tour support but after a year or so the coffers were looking a bit thin and the company had become more reticent about subsidizing gigs. The horns were ok because they weren't directly signed and were getting session fees and some gig money and the rest of band were taking time off to do sessions for other people. I would be ok when I got my advance royalty cheque from my publisher, which was due any moment, and I was relying on it to pay off my overdraft. Two days before my cheque was due Ian (exec. from Tritek publishing) phoned me and asked me to come in for a meeting.

He made me an offer I couldn't refuse. He said that because we hadn't had much success up till now I had two choices - 1. They could drop me completely or 2. I could sign a productivity deal, which meant that I would only get my advance if or when one of our records got into the top 20. If I chose 1 they would not help with the new single release but if I chose 2 I would still be under contract, all be it with no advances, and they would get behind the new track and do what they could to promote it. I had no choice but to take option 2 leaving me with an overdraft which was almost at its limit with no way to pay it off unless "When the bad men come" reached the top 20.

Anyway that's enough for now see you again soon.

## **PART 11 August 07**

Hi again. Where was I? – New single coming out.

I am in a very precarious situation here. My publisher has stopped my cheque for advanced royalties, which is now my main source of income as the band money is running out. My overdraft is dangerously near its limit and I am counting on the success of the new single to get back on track.

When your single comes out it's a bit like sitting in the bookie shop waiting for your horse to come in. You know that if it doesn't break within the first two weeks the song is dead in the water and you have to start all over again (if you can). You get promised airplay but you are not sure what time it is scheduled for so you spend hours listening to a show, which could be 2 hours long, to hear it being played. Not out of vanity but to hear feedback or even a favorable tone of voice that might suggest the DJ likes it and might give you another play later in the week. Because it's

new you are last on the list of priority and if the news overshoots or the DJ has a sudden burst of inspiration, which results in him/her using up air time to inflict his/her worldly knowledge and opinions on an eagerly awaiting nation, they will cancel your allocation.

You buy Billboard to see if you are charting and scan the columns in every music magazine for reviews or comments. It's a very stressful time.

There are hundreds of singles coming out every week so the odds in your favor of it succeeding are very low indeed. If you are looking to make big money you would be better off putting your life savings (or the remainder of your overdraft) on a rank outsider at the race track.

However, as I said before, (part 10) the new management company said they had swing in radio and TV and press and could promote us in record shops around the country. Tritek had also promised to put their weight behind it. We weren't expecting much help from EMI but at least there was a glimmer of hope.

EMI did do something for us – they got us a radio tour so me, Eddie and Gina drove around the country visiting three or four local radio stations a day which means traveling hundreds of miles. One day we had an interview in Sunderland at 10am and another one in South Wales at 2pm and then back to Newcastle for an evening show. I found this whole episode excruciatingly embarrassing - trying to act like a celebrity when the radio station, the DJ, all the listeners and even the record company executive who was driving us around had never heard of us. Also I had literally no money so it made it doubly hard trying to imitate a cool high flyer when there was a good chance that in the next couple of days I would be seeking alternative employment.

So surprisingly EMI did get their finger out and we got a dozen extra plays around the country. As for the management team who had promised us everything, their number one group had decided that they wanted to do a birthday concert at the Albert Hall so all their time was taken up by promoting them and the extra TV, radio and record shop promotion did not manifest. Tritek got us a couple of interviews but they didn't exactly push the boat out.

When I came back to London I bought Billboard. I was too afraid to look at it but when I plucked up courage to scan the top 100 chart I found that we had listed at no. 99. There was still hope and another week to go to reach the productivity target (top 20) laid down by Tritek.

See you soon  
James

## **PART 12 August 07**

So having put all my eggs in one basket here I am in the metaphysical

bookmakers of life, mixing my metaphors and waiting for my boat to come in. Wouldn't it be great if I said that it did come in and we reached the top 20, I got my advanced publishing royalties and we all lived happily every after. Yes it would be great but that's not what happened.

The week after it dropped out of the charts. EMI were umming and rrring about whether they were going to give us another chance or not. Even though they hadn't been the most supportive company in the world to be fair to them they had spent over a hundred and forty grand on us They were waiting to hear more material as they had nothing to loose I suppose but there was a little problem.

I was broke and had to take a job doing menial work, which meant that I had to put the writing on hold. This was so embarrassing as the week before I had been on the telly had done loads of radio interviews and now I was back in the real world slumming it.

I went to an agency who got me a job imputing information into a computer database. It was the same form – one page of A4 with 20 tick boxes, which I had to duplicate onto a screen from hard copy over and over again. It paid about £120 quid a week with overtime. I was now well over my overdraft limit and the bank had started to hassle me so I was willing to take anything.

What made it even more embarrassing was that I was working 50 yards from my publisher in Soho near Berwick Street. During the first week I bumped into loads of people I knew - members of bands from EMI I had met along the way and people from Tritek. They would ask me how it was going and I had to say "fine" and make some excuse to get away. Everyday, before I went to work I would dress up in my best band clothes just in case I saw somebody and everyday I had to sit in a scruffy, more factory than office, doing the most dull job in the universe, dressed like a member of Frankie Goes to Hollywood, with people wearing aprons and overalls – it wasn't the cleanest place in the world. I suppose I could have gone back to playing jazz guitar but somehow I couldn't bring myself to do it. If I were to be seen playing in a bar or a restaurant by someone who only knew me in the context of the major record company fraternity it would have killed me. At least I was out of site and most of my colleagues were of West Indian origin and into dub and high life so there's no way they would have noticed me or heard the band. At this point you would be quite right to say "what an arse hole" but I had been seduced by the world of musical commerciality and that's the way I felt so f.... off. It's really strange but once you are in that world so much depends on keeping up appearances and status and you just take it for granted that that's the way it is. Looking back I have to say I didn't like myself very much at that time and I have to take responsibility for treading that road.

Keeping up appearance is very stressful and totally embarrassing. Our management's band were about to do their birthday gig at the Albert Hall and they wanted to feature a new "Save the world" type song and wanted singers & musicians to come on stage at the end and sing it with them. Outbar was invited to join in. I managed to get to a rehearsal in my lunch

break. It made me 15 minutes late and while I was running through Berwick Street market I slipped on a cabbage leaf and fell down and tore my best trousers – bummer. The next night I appeared at the Albert Hall singing in the chorus with loads of bushy tailed, bright eyed people hoping no one would notice my dodgy repair job.

### **PART 13 August 07**

So I am now leading a double life – recording artist in the evening and minimum wage worker in the day. For some reason I started to feel quite happy – I really liked the people I worked with – they were cool – they had nothing to prove and no axe to grind. To pass the time of day and alleviate the boredom we would each put 25 pence into a pool and one of us would go around the bookies and put the money on a six horse accumulator. If all six horse came in we would have been rich and could have told the management to f.... off and all go and live in the Bahamas. They never did but we once got four in a row. It started with four of us and by the end of the week everyone wanted to join in so some days we would be taking £50 around the bookies. Pearl – the section leader would get her 6 year old son to pick the horses for us. He used to spend hours in the bookies with his granddad and knew how to study form. We would ring the bookmaker after every race and if we won one round everyone would cheer.

Sorry to go off the beaten track a bit but I can see a parallel here somehow.

It was a sad day when Andy rang me and told me he had had enough and that he was leaving the band. I had expected it and I didn't blame him. It was like saying goodbye to an old friend – in fact it was saying goodbye to an old friend (what am I talking about). It was Andy and me who had formed the thing in the first place so it was doubly sad knowing that it had come to this.

Things are a bit blurry from this point on. We did try to keep the band together. We got Steve Shone in to play the bass and Damian Butcher on keyboards – two very fine musicians from the jazz circuit. If my memory serves me well we did a week at Ronnie Scots – got some good and bad reviews but that didn't seem to matter as in my heart I knew it was all over.

The Kick Horns were (quite rightly so) getting more sessions outside the band and Eddie had started to sing with Mark Nevin and they were forming Fairground Attraction. She talked so enthusiastically about what they were doing and I knew she had found something she really wanted to do.

The band sort of drifted away. I stopped hustling my publisher and visiting EMI and no one rang me from there to ask me to go in

So that was the end.

Having said that, the end can go on for quite some time (see part 14)

## PART 14 August 07

There's an old saying that If you are indebted to your Lord and continue to work for him all is well, but if you decide to leave he will pounce on you and ask you to return everything you owe.

Well everything had finished the band was gone. I wasn't in touch with anyone as they were all off doing there own thing. I was picking up the pieces working a crappy job and paying off my bank and my rent arrears. I was managing ok and figured it would take me about a year to get back into the black. Then one day I got a letter in the post from my x solicitor. He hit me with a bill for £1,000 (I think – it may have been more or less but it was a lot of money). I thought the money had been paid to him after we had signed our contract and got our advance but apparently not. He had read through contracts and made some changes, and had also spent quite a lot of time getting Eddie out of a French record company contract she had signed some time before.

Q. What's the difference between a prostitute and a solicitor.

A. A prostitute stops fu....king you when you're dead.

Anyway, at first I thought it must be a mistake so I ignored it. He then sent me more threatening letters saying that if I didn't pay up he would send in the bailiffs.

Back story – every meeting we had with this guy (who shall be nameless and is just a figment of my distorted imagination – a literary device to spice up the story – honest – I swear by the almighty that the evidence I shall give will be the truth, the whole blah blah and the blah blah ) I would get worried that we were being charged a huge amount just for sitting in front of him. He sensed this and made a joke of my nervousness by saying "I haven't got my meter on". When I got the bill it was itemized in 6 minutes units at something like £16.60 per unit.

I went to see him and made an arrangement to pay him back at a certain amount per month – or it could have been weekly – can't remember. What I do remember is that with my weekly commitment to paying back my bank and my rent arrears and paying him his stipulated installments I was left with less than a tenner a week, which would just about cover my bus fare to work.

Unknown to me, at this same time, he (the legal figure who is just a figment of my imagination) was negotiating a £100,000 (maybe more) publishing deal and a huge record company advance – which I believe was six figures - for Fairground Attraction from which he would be getting a big percentage (which I believe was mal practice in those days). I had introduced this client (Eddie) to him when we were about to sign the Outbar deal and he was about to cash in on it.

Unknown to Eddie, at the same time, he was screwing out my eyeballs for small change.

I was in deep shit.

Somehow I managed to get by but it was hard. I walked to work most days and ate nothing but rice and homemade bread for months. I got very fit walking and I lost the weight I had put on during my more lucrative days so some good came of it.

Part 15 on its way.

## **PART 15 August 07**

I suppose because I started the band I should say what happened to me.

I was still struggling doing the crap day job for about six months. I started hawking my work around Soho. I was working there so it was easy. I got 3 jobs writing music for corporate films but I was still in a financially dodgy situation and felt a bit battered and bruised by the whole EMI experience. I couldn't even look at a guitar, never mind play one.

Through the film thing) I was asked to do sound for a News Crew. They had been badly let down and needed someone urgently. With years of experience in recording in studios, I managed to get out on the road after one days training in a garage. The money was great but the work was often dangerous and the hours long. I did this for three years and didn't play a note of music during that time. I was working with a cameraman who was 6'6" tall so, anything that came in that was a heavy story or dangerous we were sent to cover it.

The first year was disasters – Clapham rail crash (we arrived there before the ambulances), Lockerby and several other stories where I saw nothing but blood and dead people. The second year was riots where we spent most of our time sitting on council estates (one being Broadwater Farm) waiting for things to kick off. When they did my job was to deflect wall bricks with my boom stand. Twice gangs knicked our tapes and I had a knife against my throat while they did it. Then there were the poll tax riots (or was that before?) The third year was war stories – we spent loads of time at airports waiting for visas to allow us to fly out to the Gulf - luckily they never came but the tension was beginning to get to me. I had written my girlfriend a cheque for all the money I had in the bank (which by now was quite considerable). She kept it in one of her draws with instructions to cash it if I didn't come back.

As stressful as all this might sound, it fared light in comparison to the tougher times with the record company. It also played an important role in the healing process. During the whole record company experience I had crossed many lines that I could not have previously imagined myself crossing. I had lost my self respect knowing that I had sold out to commerciality rather than being true to my own ethics. I had behaved badly and sometimes disrespectfully towards others and that weighed

heavy upon me.

I was now in a completely different situation where I had proved myself many times. Being a soundman you are the eyes of the cameraman as his vision is limited to what he sees through his lens. I had got him out of many sticky situations (and he did the same for me) and I kept it together and never broke down under fire. I was respected by my colleagues and regarded as reliable, trust worthy and someone to be with in a crisis situation. I liked myself again even though my nerves were a bit shot up.

The job may sound a bit arduous (and have to admit it did get to me in the end) but we occasionally did do some nice stuff and this is one of them, and it indirectly concerns our band. We had just spent three nights filming riots in Oxford. I was exhausted and I hadn't washed for about 36 hours. I had shaved my head and had a three-day beard and was looking like Bruce Willis on a bad day (a very bad day). We were the only crew left on call so we had to go and cover the Brit Awards. All the other TV crews were in DJ's and looked dead smart, but we looked like we had just come out of a war zone (which we had I suppose). While I was there I met Boris who I didn't recognize at first because he was playing for the Cure and had smudgy lipstick all over his face. It was great to see him and be in a warm cozy place with free champagne and small edibles, which I was busy devouring. I was well out of the scene by then and had little interest in it so it was a complete surprise to see Eddi getting up on the stage to receive two Brit Awards. I remember being on the balcony filming her. When she saw me in the foyer she came running over and put her arms around me and almost dropped the awards. It was great to see her again (it must have been a year or more). She looked so happy. I think she was a bit confused why I was standing there with my boom mike and headphones looking like a storm trooper.

The other nice job didn't turn out that well. We got sent to film a holiday program, which I was really looking forward to – nice sandy beaches and a few weeks in a posh hotel – unfortunately it was in Yugoslavia and while we were there the war broke out and the shit hit the fan. Can you believe that?

After 3 years I quit

I was missing music so much. I suppose I could have gone back to playing jazz guitar and there were quite a few offers but the whole thing disinterested me. I needed to start all over again and regain that enthusiasm you have when you are a kid and get your first guitar – you learn a simple chord and you play it and its sounds fantastic to you even though it's simple.

One day I was walking past a string shop and saw a cello in the window. I went in and bought it. For a year or more I did nothing but practice and did quite well. Somehow my left hand was still in shape so it was relatively easy for me despite the difference in tuning. The bowing took longer but I worked hard to get it together. I was eventually taken on by an ex pupil from the Moscow Conservatoire who was trained by

Rostropovich. She was very interested in my improvisations in the style of jazz and blues that I had been developing in parallel to classical repertoire so we started to swap lessons. I was practicing almost 8 hours a day developing a classical technique and non-classical styles of playing.

I started composing again and soon had enough material to start my ensemble Cellorhythmics which I formed with Cellist Alfia Nakipbekova.

We now have our own record company (WCM – Working Classical Music) and have released three CD's

I suppose I should sum up. I don't really know why I wrote this blog. I suppose it started after I received some interest in a novel I am writing Having got into the habit of writing it was great just to lay down unedited streams of consciousness about a particular period that, although not always happy, was significant to an important learning curve. Also (I suppose) I wanted to put the record straight. What little has been written about the band was viewed in the light of its later incarnations and is often negative and pays no attention to the brilliant musicianship and sincerity of its members who put so much into it. Most importantly it allowed me to focus on my current work with a determination never ever to compromise or be swayed by anyone or any company who think they know better.

Hope you enjoyed it – James

Addendum - As for the rest of the band -

Richard (drummer) went back to playing sessions, produces/writes jingles and theme tunes and spent quite a long period playing, recording and touring with Manfred Man. From what I hear he now has his own production company and is doing very well.

Andy (bass) (who before he was a musician was a brilliant mathematician) went back to college and got a stunning degree (at Oxford I think) in computer something or other. He is now back on the scene playing as well, if not better than ever and he is happy. He currently plays with Victoria Hart and is in great demand as a session player.

Barbara (trumpet) played for some time on the Latin circuit and later formed her own band and started recording her own material. She is also in great demand as a session player.

The Kick Horns (horn section) (Tim, Roddy and Simon) became the best horn section in Europe and have played with just about everyone including Eric Clapton. If you hear a record on the radio and it has a horn section playing on it there's a 90% chance that it's them. Their discography includes Blur, Jamiroquai, Tom Jones, Baaba Maal, The Rolling Stones, Rod Stewart and if I was to go on the list would be as long as all the blogs on this site – if not longer.

Martin (percussion) – has played percussion with just about everybody

including the Stones – Diana Ross and spent a couple of years as percussionist/drummer with Sade etc etc. If I were to list everything his resume' it would be longer than this blog.

Eddie (singer) – became a world famous singer – firstly with Fairground Attraction and later as a solo artist.

Gina (singer) went back to the session world and has sung on quite a few hit records plus she also had her own deal. Haven't heard from her for ages and I hope she is well and happy.

Geoffrey Gurd (producer) – had a major international hit with one of his songs and moved to LA where he was successful as a songwriter/producer. He is now back living in Europe writing and producing for Victoria Hart. Her debut album came out last month and sold 6,000 copies in the first few days.

Jim Preen (producer) – After years of running the successful Red Shop studios he went into TV and also formed his own blues band and recorded his own album. Haven't seen him for a while – someone said he had moved to Hong Kong or was it Singapore. Wherever he is now I'm sure he is doing well.

John Leckie (producer) is still around and kickin – he has produced just about everybody and I couldn't even start to list it – Radiohead is just one that comes to mind. We are still friends and see each other from time to time.

Boris (Drummer) – joined the Thompson Twins and played with them for a while and then joined The Cure – I think he still plays with them. As I said - the last time I saw him he was wearing all black and his face covered in smudgy lipstick – he looked good.

