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THE MELODIC ROCK MAGAZINE

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GREGG FULKERSON

Do you remember when you were grabbed by a song on the radio or television and you had no idea who it was? Lets go back to 1990. The song was 'Rocking with the Radio' from the Blue Tears debut album. I had no idea who Blue Tears were, but then again, it wasn't uncommon at that time to hear something that you liked on the radio given the amount of 'new' bands being signed by the majors. It took me a year or two to track the album down (let's remember it was pre-internet/CDr days!) and over the course of a few weeks Blue Tears became a staple in the car cassette player. Years passed, and with the advent of the internet came the realisation that Blue Tears, a band from Henderson, Tennessee, were something of an underground sensation with a small but loyal following all over the world, not just a single fan in Ireland!

In 2003, I sent band leader Gregg Fulkerson an e-mail asking about the possibility of bringing the band out of retirement to play Firefest. I received a reply from Gregg within a day or two thanking me for my mail, but politely refusing our offer. Well, not being one to take no for an answer, I asked Gregg for his number so I could discuss the details with him in person. What followed was the beginning of a lasting friendship.

Gregg was a laid back character, in fact so laid back you wondered if in fact he was even bothered to be playing or recording, but in truth, this was the nature of a man who placed music first and foremost in his life and he was so at ease with what he was doing, nothing ever phased him. The planning for FF 2 was so simple; Gregg simply said "See you there", and he did. In fact, when our transport guys turned up at the airport to collect them Blue Tears were nowhere to be found. After a plethora of phone calls to the USA, ringing wives, girlfriends and family members, it turned out that the band were already in Nottingham, ensconced in their hotel taking it easy. Gregg enjoying a coffee and a cigar whilst all around him were losing their minds looking for him. When we finally tracked Gregg down, he simply said "We took an earlier flight, but hey, what's the problem? I told you we would be here." After playing Firefest on both Friday and Saturday, and suffering from a heavy cold, we headed out for Greece for another Firefest. We had a great time. Blue Tears, House of Lords, Danger Danger, plus myself, Tony and Amber Marshall had a blast. At the pre-show party the night before in a local bar, the 'Rocking with the Radio' video was played and Gregg was startled. He was even more amazed with the queue that quickly formed with fans requesting autographs and photographs. He genuinely thought that the people were waiting for James Christian who was sitting beside him at the bar!

'The Innocent Ones' was an album that I was immensely proud to be involved in. In fact Gregg said many times that it was playing FF that rekindled his desire to record new Blue Tears music, given the fantastic reception afforded to the band in both England and Greece. However, prior to 'The Innocent Ones' Gregg released 'Dancin on the Backstreets' and 'Mad, Bad and Dangerous', both of which contained unreleased and demo versions of Blue Tears music, most of which was previously unheard. Tracks such as 'Rock You to Heaven', 'Kisses in the Dark', 'Date With Destiny' and 'Long Way Home' further cement the fact that Gregg was a master songwriter, capable of not only matching but surpassing some of his more commercially successful contemporaries. If further proof of this statement is needed look no further than the Michael Sweet (Stryper) debut album - Gregg not only co-produced but claimed co-writes on four tracks and played lead guitar on the sublime 'All This and Heaven Too'.

And so, on April 14th, Gregg was found dead on the porch of his apartment, from (at time of writing) undetermined causes. Honestly, I am still in shock. Gregg and I had actually talked about trying to bring the original Blue Tears back to play a future Firefest and we spoke and e-mailed regularly on all sorts of topics, inevitably every conversation turning to music. Sadly Blue Tears is over. Gregg was the heart and soul of the band. He is irreplaceable. His ability and talent never fully recognized, even within the genre that we call melodic hard rock. Gregg leaves us with a musical legacy of one (Blue Tears) major label release, two retrospectives and the last Blue Tears recording, 'The Innocent Ones', on which Gregg redefined the sound of Blue Tears into a more Americana style album, with the standout track 'Gloryland' paying homage to his own personal hero, The Boss, Bruce Springsteen. In fact, if I may as bold to say, I'll bet that Springsteen himself would be proud to write a track like that.

Now, almost two weeks after Gregg's death, it still hasn't sunk in. Not only is Blue Tears consigned to history, but Gregg Fulkerson, singer, songwriter and producer is no longer with us. The phone is silent, no more late night calls shooting the breeze, and there will be no more Blue Tears music to look forward to. I intend to send a copy of this magazine to his young son, Carter, to let him know that his dad was a real rock star and that his music continues to brighten the day every time it's played. It's also to let him know that we, as a melodic rock community, mourn the loss of one of the nicest, most genuine individuals you could ever wish to meet. I'm still not sure what I have written makes sense, hopefully it does.

Gregg, you will be sorely missed by all of us at Firefest, and indeed by every single fan of your music around the world. Your music touched the lives of a lot of people, and for that we are all extremely grateful. There's still nothing like blasting 'Thunder in the Night' out of the car stereo on a sunny day at top volume. I don't know how to describe it, but it has a feel good factor that nothing can take away. On behalf of all your fans and friends around the world, thanks for the music - we will always have it.

Kieran Dargan, April 26th 2009. Photo of Gregg from Firefest II by Jeff Price

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EDITORIAL

It seems almost indecent to be talking about the upcoming Firefest this October, after the sad and untimely loss of Gregg Fulkerson only a matter of weeks ago. The loss has deeply affected all of us here at Fireworks, who had the pleasure of working with the easy-going and affable Gregg at Firefest 2 when he brought Blue Tears over for the day. Kieran Dargan expresses all our thoughts on the opposite page, but this world is truly a sadder place without Gregg and his music here.

The line-up for Firefest 6 has now been announced - see advert this issue. We're delighted to have FM back, after their wonderful sell-out performance at Firefest 4, as well as White Sister returning after their triumphant display last year. Both bands intend having new albums out on the day of the show.

One of the enjoyable aspects of Firefest, speaking as a fan, is getting old bands to reform. We've done it in the past with House of Lords, Valentine, White Sister, Blue Tears ... and this year is no exception having the wonderful Romeo's Daughter and Airrace returning to the live scene after many years away. We hope you will enjoy these performances as much as us.

Live music is not a competition. When he thought Firefest 5 was going to be the last, Mark Owen decided to organise a replacement festival, calling it Rockfest. As it turns out, with Firefest 6 returning around its usual date, the fans now have two great festivals to attend. As said, it's not a competition and us AOR fans have never had it so good. I'll be down there at Rockfest having a great time, as will Mark at Firefest. And I hope, finances allowing, many of our readers will be supporting both events. See you there!!

And if any of you are going to Z Rock at the end of May, hope to see you there too!

Winners of last issue's Winterstrain competition: Philip Sokolski, Leslie Wood, John Beckett, Mark Colerain, Michael Williams, Alan Bowers, Steve Hodgkinson, Phil Samuels, Colin Davies & Colin St George.

Okay, I'm off to listen to the new Magnum album again, and hope it grows on me...

Until next time .. wishing you a Great Adventure!

Bruce

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If the above box is checked, that means this is the last issue of your subscription. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support, and hope you've enjoyed the magazine enough to continue.

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ULYSSES

If you are partial to a mix of rock metal and jazz then lend an ear to the excellent ULYSSES from Holland. The band have been getting very good feedback for their new CD 'The Gift Of Tears' which they have released through Symbioses Music. I got together with guitarist Sylvester Vogelenzang de Jong to find out more.

The band are Michael Hos on vocals, Ron Mozer on keyboards, Sylvester Vogelenzang de Jong on guitar, René van Haaren on drums and bassist Casper Kroon. The band have had a history of twenty years in the music. 'I personally started in a local thrash-metal band back in 1989 and since then it became an addiction to play, write and record music,' explains Sylvester.

Ulysses was formed by Sylvester and Ron in 1998. 'Over ten years ago now, and we had the intention to just jam and make some awesome music for fun. Soon it grew out of all proportions and the press saw us as the new 'progressive' promise. After that we released an EP in 2001 called 'Eclectic' and two albums: 'Symbioses' in 2003 and recently 'The Gift of Tears'.

It took the band more than five years to release a new album. 'We had the time to work on the album. We have a lot of musical influences within the band. Some of us are into neo prog/symphonic rock and some are more into progressive metal and other stuff. I am very proud of the fact that you can hear all influences of each individual, without making it a fragmented album. It has become a signature of our style. And 'The Gift of Tears' is a good representation of Ulysses at this moment. Progmetal fans and Symphonic fans appreciate the album.'

Sylvester did most part of the production and



editing of the recordings.' Most of the time René joined me and together we worked on the production process. The album was engineered by Jan Dekker. All guitars and bass were recorded at my home studio. Drums were recorded at Prosound Media where we also did the mix of the album. Vocals were done at several locations, this because Michael lives on the other side of the country. In the end we gathered all recordings on mobile hard discs and we put them all in the mixing console... long live modern studios!

Ulysses have created a healthy live following. 'The new songs work very well on the crowd. I have heard remarks like "You guys are even better live than on the album" and I take that as a big compliment. The music we make is not the easiest you can pick. It ain't straight on rock and roll. The album is pretty complex,

with lots of orchestration. So far we manage to get the atmosphere across, and the audience appreciates it very much. And live I add little extra metal to the flavour,' he laughs.

The band is currently working hard on playing live. 'We are trying very hard to get more live shows on the road. We love to play and have fun with the audience. We would like to come over to the UK. Hopefully we can do a tour at the end of the summer. In the meantime we are already writing on new material for a new album and some of us are involved in some musical projects, so are off the streets for a while.. Check us out when are playing near you!'

Check them out www.ulysses-online.nl & www.myspace.com/ulyssesnl



From Los Angeles arrive avanté psychedelia mob HEAVY WATER EXPERIMENTS. The band have already been causing a bit of a stir from the like of Mojo, NME and more recently Classic Rock Magazine where one Geoff Barton was going a little nutty over them. They now have distribution in the UK secured for the stunning new self-titled CD through Cargo and you can check the band out via the links below.

The band is David Melbye on vocals and 8-string bass/electric guitar, Rebecca Black on electric piano and vocals, Rick Staggs on bass, and Roberto Salguero on drums. I caught up with David Melbye to find out more about this excellent band.

I asked David how he became involved with music. 'My parents are/were both musical. My mother was a semi-professional opera singer for a time, and my father still plays both classical piano and pipe organ also semiprofessionally.' David joined the school orchestra playing French Horn at around 9 years old. He then later, after discovering Led Zep and other bands, picked up the electric bass. 'Vocals, guitar and piano would come later. It wasn't until my college years that I really became inspired to pursue original music, based mostly on a lot of late 60s and early 70s psychedelia I was discovering at that time. I formed my first original music project during those years and have been running projects ever since.'

HWE has been around for a few years now. 'Band names and members have changed, but the basic vision remains intact. It is a four-piece ensemble with guitar/8-string bass - I alternate - keyboards, 4-string bass and drums. We are pursuing what I would call 'avant-psychedelia' meaning that we have no stake in reviving the hippie era or sounds associated with it. For me, 'psychedelia' refers moreover to a visceral approach to song-writing and recording and less to a specific sound or subculture from the past. In recent years, our drummer Roberto has become more like a collaborative partner than simply a player in the band. That is, we share the same tastes and we want to achieve the same things with music.'

The new album is remarkably good and the reviews coming have been very supportive. 'We actually released a debut album under our former band name, so technically, this is our second release. We plan to re-release this former debut under the HWE moniker with some added improvements. Roberto plays all the drums and percussion, and I did the rest. I would dare to say it is a boldly eclectic album, its range from heavier stoner rock feels to mellower sounds will not appeal to all listeners. But the melodic quality is consistent, so I think listeners of rich palettes will certainly appreciate its originality and emotional thrust. There is no pattern to the name-drop com-

parisons the album gets, and this is why we like to use 'marriage' characterizations like 'Pink Sabbath', 'Doorphine' or 'Radio Queens of the Stone Head'.

The album was recorded in different locations. 'The basic tracks, mainly drums, were recorded on two-inch analog tape at a studio in North Hollywood, and then the other instruments and overdubs were done at an engineer's apartment in Hollywood. We also did some tracking in a 70-foot high, abandoned silo way out in the desert. I produced the album myself with one engineer/mixer assisting.'

The band have already performed in the UK. 'We've done a handful of 'DIY' tours so far: two in the UK and Benelux and one in the US. Under these circumstances, it is typical to have sparsely attended shows, but even when this was the case people came forward to express their appreciation of our original sound. Lately, we've been trying out our female keyboard player as a front singer, and so far, it's going really well. She's a lot more extroverted than I am, and her singing gives me a chance to focus more on the 8-string bass, which I treat more like a lead guitar. I think it's safe to say our live show is better than ever, and LA audiences have been really enthusiastic. I hope we'll get back overseas, where we belong, very soon!'

David and the band are currently working on the next CD. 'Our next album, which is almost finished now, is a lot mellower and more acoustic-oriented. After this release we intend to do something really heavy and dark, probably with a number of instrumental tracks included. We'll be putting out a video for the track 'Otherland' very soon and we're also hoping to have some live footage up soon. In any case, we'll be sticking with our current band name. I think it really fits what we're all about.'

Check the band out at www.heavywaterexperiments.com & www.myspace.com/heavywaterexperiments

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