

Art Garfunkel with Buddy Mondlock & Maia Sharp

– De Montfort Hall, Leicester, 20th March 2003

The Fellowship of the Song - Part III - Harmony In The UK.....

Earlier this year we featured a two-part interview with Nashville based songwriter Buddy Mondlock, where he talked about his new recording partnership with Art Garfunkel and Maia Sharp. From the original *germ of an idea*, and with input from inspired album producer Billy Mann, Buddy described how the project evolved into a series of songs featuring Art Garfunkel as a co-writer, through to the traumatic mid September 2001 recording sessions, and taking the “**Everything Waits To Be Noticed**” show *on the road* in the U.S.A. late last year. Further US dates begin tonight - 27th March. Trilogy’s are *de rigueur* currently, so here *live in the UK* is the *always intended* final part of The Fellowship of the Song.....

With a capacity of over just 2000, fifteen minutes before show time, the audience appeared somewhat sparse with a significant proportion displaying salt and pepper hair, and waistlines that had been a little more svelte around four decades ago. When the lights dimmed just after 8.00pm, most of those empty seats were occupied. Black seemed to be the theme colour for the evening, the stage backdrop consisting of a large curtain which later proved to have a centre opening.

Buddy Mondlock was first up, black denims, black T-shirt and his six stringed friend, Martin. With a quick “*Good evening everybody*” he launched into his Rome travelogue, “The Cats Of The Colosseum,” a cautionary tale that curiously involves spending “*the afternoon at American Express*” a act that is clarified in the following verse by “*And my traveller’s cheques are gone, In a nine year olds hand.*” Anyone in the audience who has visited Italy’s capital city will have been well aware of those cats.....and the street urchin pickpockets. One down, it was “*my name is Buddy Mondlock*” and instantly he was introducing “The Leaving.” The first of a trio of songs from his current album “**Poetic Justice**” – “*for sale in the foyer tonight, folks*” - Mondlock said he attempted to approach the subject of “*somebody leaving somebody*” from a new perspective, then added wryly “*and they’re happy about it.*” “Nanci Griffith,” Buddy said, “recorded “*Coming Down In The Rain*” on her “**Other Voices, Other Rooms**” album.” The disc became the 1993 Contemporary Folk Grammy winner, and six year later Griffith furnished the harmony vocal when Buddy cut his version. It was his third song of the evening. His fourth and final selection “No Choice” closes “**Poetic Justice**,” but, historically, the song dates from the mid-eighties. It first appeared on his solo debut, “**On The Line.**” A paean to the reality that writers are mysteriously driven to write – *sic. they have no choice*, I wondered how many of the Leicester audience truly understood the poignancy of Buddy’s introduction, “*I dedicate this song to songwriters everywhere and to Dave Carter in particular,*” let alone the naked beauty of the words he sang. It wasn’t the opening lines “*It was a love so big that it filled his heart, ‘Til it swelled and finally burst apart*” so much as the reality that, for a short time in public, Carter “*gave his river a voice*” and the truth that “*he felt his pain and he felt his joy.*” I’m certain Dave was listening. I know chills ran down my spine.....and I hope I wasn’t alone. Mark this down as major highlight of the evening # 1.

Where Buddy had made his entrance from stage right, following a short introduction by Mondlock, Maia Sharp took the stage from the left. For her solo set she was joined by, Joseph Zimmerman on bass and Art’s drummer Tommy Igoe. Her set, of four originals, featured two selections from her 1997 debut “**Hardly Glamour**” and a pair from last summer’s self-titled collection. I guess there’s a certain mathematical precision about the foregoing, and for “I Need This To Be Love” and “Long Way Home” Sharp played guitar. Where Mondlock can pick intricately out a melody while employing the heel of his right hand as percussive support, Sharp’s skills on guitar appeared less developed. Then again, in relation to her male co-stars, Sharp is a relative youngster. Sitting down at a keyboard, named Roland, for the second half of her set, midway through “The Apology,” from “**Hardly Glamour**,” she rose to deliver the first of a number of searing tenor saxophone solos that became a feature of the evening. Replete with another *upstanding* sax solo, “Willing To Burn,” from her most recent release, closed Sharp’s set.

Following a short intermission, as the lights dimmed, the auditorium was filled with Pipes of Pan styled ethereal/New Age instrumental sounds c/o Art’s band, as they awaited his arrival. He entered with a flourish, through a central division in the stage backdrop. Clad in blue denims his ensemble was topped off by a black shirt “*work on the outside.*” Strike three for colour co-ordinated correctness, and the band segued from Pan into the rhythmically not dissimilar, yet familiar melody of, “El Condor Pasa.” That over,

considering what had just occurred in the Middle East, Art's between song introduction included *"We're going to bring on Hans Blix to play spoons. The poor man doesn't know what to do with himself,"* and then, significantly, Garfunkel launched into "American Tune." Featuring the lines, *"So far away from home, so far away from home"* and *"We come in the age's most uncertain hour,"* I wonder whether the song had been a feature of earlier European tour dates. Buddy and his pal Martin returned to the stage to assist on "Heart In New York," as Garfunkel tendered an apology on behalf of America *"For making the world a more dangerous place."* Partway through the song Maia arrived, from the left again, to deliver another stratospheric sax solo.

With his *support staff* once more reduced to a quartet, Garfunkel's # 1 UK pop chart hit from late 1976, "I Only Have Eyes For You," was prefaced with, *"Thanks to you for this one. It will put my son through College."* For the first time that evening, an array of twinkling *star like* lights lit the entire backdrop. Stars come and go, but these lights appeared from time to time through the remainder of the evening – in fact, Garfunkel exhorted the control desk at one stage - *"leave them up."* Donning spectacles, by way of highlighting how *the trio* penned songs had evolved, Art read a short abstract from his prose poem # 79 [penned September 1987] – *"In London twenty years ago in St. James's Park at the break of dawn, Paul and I and Beverly were easing down from an all-night high."* The sixties apart, later, Beverly was John Martyn's wife [for a time] and the voice on the **"Bookends"** cut "Fakin' It" – *"Good morning, Mr. Leitch. Have you had a busy day ?"* [*] While delivering this oration, Mondlock and Sharp returned and Buddy initially took the lead vocal on the title cut from **"Everything Waits To Be Noticed."** "The Thread," with a sax solo from Maia, was followed by a rousing rendition of "Cecilia" including some *band* solos. On Korg synthesiser Michael Bellar offered an interesting calypso, while Iggo's drum break seemed interminable and Garfunkel's *"Now you know we've got a drummer in our band"* far from convinced this guy. What was "the thing" *musically* for the sixties is best left buried there.

Following another short reading – from # 41, Art credited co-writer Pierce Pettis and the fact that it was *"probably his favourite song on the trio album"*, the threesome performed "In A Perfect Moment." As the sound of their voices died away [on the closing line], Garfunkel flicked his left thumb toward Mondlock as if to say *"and of course this guy contributed to the composition."* "Scarborough Fair" included a short solo, on sax, from Maia, and was followed by Mondlock's masterful tribute to *daydreamers everywhere*, "The Kid," with Garfunkel taking the opening verse. "Bounce," penned in London by producer Billy Mann and Graham Lyle [#], the effervescent opening cut on **"Everything Waits To Be Noticed"** brought the trio's seven song set, highlight # 2 of the evening, to a conclusion.

Alone again with his quartet, Garfunkel set about naming his five favourite songwriters. *"Dylan, Randy Newman – he's kind of satirical, James Taylor, Paul Simon and finally, Jimmy Webb."* Webb's "All I Know" followed and Bellar's closing break neatly segued into "Bright Eyes." Next, Art mentioned how he and his *old partner* had been honoured, recently, with a Lifetime Achievement Grammy. His *"That's bordering on asking for your own applause,"* was followed by a diatribe about calling the duo *"Garfunkel And Simon.....but he convinced me the names should be alphabetical."* As Art undid his shirt cuff buttons and rolled up his sleeves, he recalled a lyric change he'd suggested on "Mrs Robinson," then added *"He was so touchy back then."* A rollicking interpretation brought the most applause of the evening. I guess *nostalgia* works for a certain demographic and this Midlands audience had just been thoroughly milked.

Band introduction over, "Bridge Over Troubled Water" followed and Art departed to *applause, applause*. Having opened with one cut from that classic collection, he'd closed with the title song. Returning with guitarist Tab Levan, and following further comments about Iraq and how *"We never got around to recording it"* he delivered "The Side Of A Hill." A little known Paul Simon tune that packs a mighty anti-war message, along with "A Church Is Burning" [\$] it's the only **"Paul Simon Songbook"** track, a British only release circa 1965, to suffer that fate. Simple and totally effective, the guitar and voice reading of, "The Side Of A Hill" was major highlight # 3.

Buddy and the band returned for "Sound Of Silence," and aurally the rendition rose to a climax and then slowly faded as one by one the members of the band and Mondlock left the stage, leaving Garfunkel to accept the applause that washed in waves toward the stage. Recalling how, as a teenager, *"me and my pal, Paul Simon, from three blocks away"* loved the doo wop music of The Penguins and The Moonglows, Garfunkel was joined by the full ensemble and they launched into Jesse Belvin's "Goodnight My Love {Pleasant Dreams}." Without a break, as Garfunkel edged gradually towards the rear curtain, the band picked up the melody of Marvin Gaye's "What's Goin' On" and pausing by the backdrop Art

delivered the opening lines “*Mother, mother there's too many of you crying...*” through “*You see, war is not the answer, for only love can conquer hate.....*” and he was gone. Leaving, exactly as he'd entered some eighteen songs earlier, through that division in the curtain.

I wonder whether, prior to the Leicester show, audiences were treated to “American Tune,” “The Side Of A Hill” and “What’s Goin’ On”? Without stating it words, Garfunkel had made his *current conflict* position crystal clear. With Maia Sharp and Buddy Mondlock in tow, Garfunkel proved that after all these years, *musically*, the *voice of an angel* was still in touch.....

Note.

[*] – Curiously John Martyn was a Scot, born in Glasgow, as was Mr. D. P. Leitch – aka Donovan.

[#] – With his performing partner Benny Gallagher, both Scots, Lyle composed “Breakaway,” the title cut of Garfunkel’s 1975 sophomore solo album.

[\$] – Although I don’t ever recall reading clarification, Simon’s song was probably written in the wake of the death of the “Birmingham Four” on Sunday 15th September 1963. A number of other contemporary folk songs have been written concerning the events of that day.

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[1840 words]