

A part from a couple of years when he lived in Manchester, Michael Weston King has lived in Southport all his life. According to the leader of The Good Sons, his first musical recollection was "seeing T. Rex on Top Of The Pops. I passed my 11+ exam and my parents asked me what I wanted, so I told them *Electric Warrior* by T. Rex. Ever

matter of two paragraphs, perhaps we should return to King's early teen years for further examination. During this period he became friendly with Tim Cotterall and his elder, guitar playing brother, Andrew.

"I used to aspire to do what his brother did. Tim also played guitar and taught me to play Don McLean songs, *American Pie* and all that stuff."

who used to manage The Eurythmics managed us for a while. Over time, we became more desperate to get a big deal and changed the music . . . kept changing it. In the end, we sounded like Tears For Fears.

"Around that time, Dwight Yoakam and Lyle Lovett and all the new country acts were coming over. It was like, 'This music I'm playing is miles away from what I like.' I finished it all and went back to playing acoustic guitar and writing. After about a year, I met Gary Hall and joined The Stormkeepers. That happened in 1989."

The next four years were spent criss-crossing the United Kingdom and Europe. King was involved in the recording of two albums by The Stormkeepers on the Run River label, *Garage Heart* (1989) – "I had just joined the band as it was being finished" – and *Wide Open To The World* (1991).

When the Round Tower label approached Hall with a record deal, The Stormkeepers split up. Gary's debut solo album for the Dublin based label, *What Goes Around* (1993), was cut in Nashville and prominently featured Phil Abram, former guitarist with Mirrors Over Kiev.

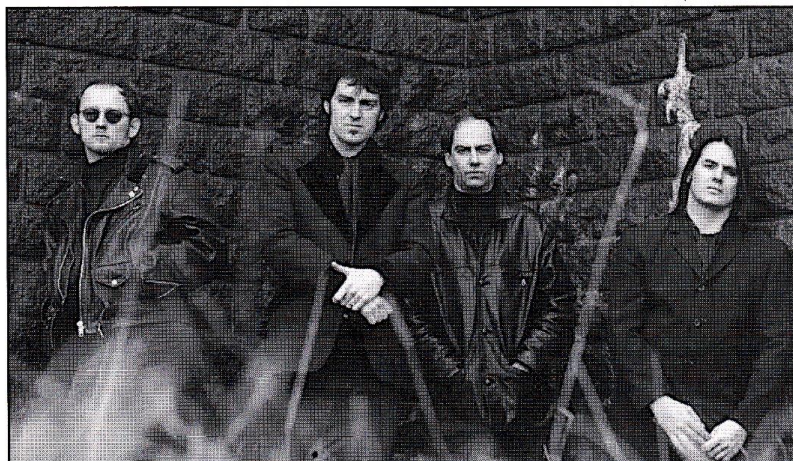
"Gary wanted to stop being in a band and just do a solo acoustic thing. He was into Tom Russell and doing the songwriter bit. Sean (McFetridge) and I still wanted to be in a rock'n'roll band so we started again."

Was this the birth of The Good Sons? Well, almost, because initially King worked as road manager on a number of tours including the return to these shores of 60s "one hit wonder" Arthur Brown.

"Then I did the Townes (Van Zandt) tour. Chas (Cole) and I had been to the States for three weeks, as a holiday really. We met with a few people with regard to CMP (*that's Cole Music Productions, not Country Music People*). I'd always wanted to go and sold a guitar to be able to pay for the trip. We met Keith Case, who looked after Townes, and started booking him. I ended up road managing and opening for Townes, and a great friendship ensued."

The Good Sons witnessed the merging of musicians from two former Run River bands. Michael Weston King (guitar) and Sean McFetridge (bass) from The Stormkeepers, and Phil Abram (guitar) and Ben Jackson (drums) from Mirrors Over Kiev.

"We only had a few original songs, rehearsed them and did a few gigs, and set about recording an album. After we finished each track, we'd send a copy to



The Good Sons: Ben Jackson, Michael Weston King, Phil Abram and Sean McFetridge

Interview with Michael Weston King of progressive UK country band

The Good Sons

since then, I've just been playing and playing."

Through the ensuing teenage years, numerous styles influenced him: "Glam rock and heavy metal . . . Well, not heavy metal, but bands like Led Zeppelin. When punk came along, that changed everything. I particularly liked Elvis Costello, who you couldn't class as a punk artist, but obviously came along with that generation."

In 1981 Costello headed for Nashville where he recorded the country-slanted album, *Almost Blue*, produced by Billy Sherrill.

"I got turned on to country music because of that disc. I went on to discover more. Thankfully, Costello's tastes were particularly good, a Gram Parsons track, and so on. That's how I got to where I am today."

Having spanned three decades in a

Through his involvement with a religious youth group called The Crusaders, King formed a gospel group called The Burning Bush Band. From there, he went on to form his first rock band, Double Agents.

That quintet lasted some six months and featured Chas Cole, Andrew Cotterall, Steve Robottom and his sister, Alison. Steve, Chas and Michael later formed The Tradition.

"That was a Joy Division kind of thing. Eventually there were just two of us left and we became Fragile Friends. That was me and Chas Cole."

One cassette album, *For-Play*, and a couple of singles, *Paper Doll* and *The Novelty Wears Off*, resulted from that grouping. "We became part of that Liverpool scene of the early 80s, along with people like China Crisis. The guy

Glitterhouse in Germany."

As I was curious to know why The Good Sons would consider a foreign record label, Michael explains, "Three or four labels were picked out. Not major labels . . . Domino, Mammoth and Food. They all put out records we liked. Reinhard (owner of Glitterhouse) rang me and said, 'Yeah, I like this, but we're a bit short of money at the moment.' By the time we had three tracks, he rang up and said, 'Look, I really do like this. Here's the money.' He gave us enough money to finish the record."

The basic release policy of this German imprint is the licensing of recordings by, mainly, American and native solo performers and bands. "We're the only English band that's signed to Glitterhouse."

The first Good Sons album, *Singing The Glory Down*, was issued in 1995. Townes Van Zandt appears on the track, *Riding The Range*, written by King. "I was on my second tour with him. We'd got on really well. He liked my material and I said, 'There's one track I'd really like you to do. When we play in Manchester, do you want to come to the studio in the afternoon? He said, 'Yeah, sure.' He got to the studio . . . we did about six takes and cut a couple of bits together. I believe he wouldn't have done it unless he actually liked the song. He certainly wouldn't have recorded the song himself if he didn't like it."

"He used to come and sit in the audience when I was playing as his opening act, and that was a real compliment. After a while, the fact that he was Townes Van Zandt became irrelevant – he was just somebody I got to know really well."

During recent years, the Glitterhouse catalogue has featured a growing number of 1000-copy pressings for mail order sale only. The Good Sons achieved the accolade of a limited edition release in 1996, *The King's Highway*.

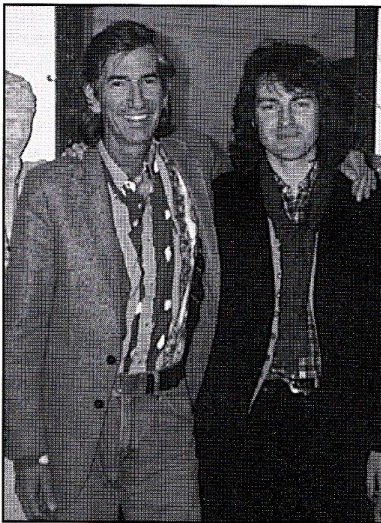
"I used to open for The Stormkeepers doing acoustic sets. A lot of the stuff that is on *The King's Highway* was from that period. Some of those versions are the first time that they've even been played other than me writing them. It was great to get those out of my system but, at the same time, they're probably . . . not folkie . . . not the type of song I'm now writing for the band."

"When I attended The Crusaders, we used to perform *The King's Highway*, which was a kind of rock'n'roll song, but it was also a praise song. That's why I ended up using that title for the second album. And, of course, relative to my surname . . . the pun was intended."

All The Good Sons albums to date, including last year's *Wines, Lines And Valentines*, have been recorded at The Cutting Room in Manchester.

"We get a good deal there. Glitterhouse have not got a huge amount of money to give us to make a record. You could spend the budget in a brilliant studio in two days. I'm really pleased with the new record and how it has turned out. Now we've signed to Watermelon in the States, we're going to be given a larger budget to make the fourth record."

Wines, Lines And Valentines opens with *Angels In The End*, a power chord-driven tribute to contemporary Scottish songwriter Roddy Frame. The material on this disc finds leader and sole songwriter King ploughing a rich furrow of roots oriented



Townes Van Zandt and Michael King

country material. Imagine a cross between Wilco and The Jayhawks but with English reserve and (where necessary) a dash of true British grit, that's The Good Sons.

Wines, Lines And Valentines is to be released by the Austin, Texas Watermelon label soon. The band is scheduled to undertake its debut tour during March, including an appearance at the Watermelon showcase during the annual South By Southwest music industry junket.

"I believe that the gig is going to happen in an old porno cinema in Austin."

How had the deal with Watermelon come about?

"I approached Hightone and Sugar Hill. Larry Sloven at Hightone really liked the album and wanted to release it. He said, 'I'd get involved if you were American, but I will never sign an English band. You're not here to tour all the time, which we need our acts to do.' People like Tom Russell and Chris Smither are on the road for weeks on end."

"I knew Carol Young who manages Chris Smither and I told her, 'We've been trying to get an American deal. Here's a couple of copies of the first album. Can

you pass them on to anybody you think would be appropriate.' She passed one to Heinz Geissler."

"He was pretty dejected about the music industry and picked up our album and thought, 'What's this?' Put it on. It was about two in the morning. He stayed up all night listening to it. There's this fantastic tape message on Carol's answer machine just saying, 'This is the best record I've heard in the past three years,' and that's how he came to sign us."

When Geissler heard of the existence of *Wines, Lines And Valentines*, he decided to release the newer recording.

"To me, it would be a strange step to reissue *Singing The Glory Down*, say, later in 1998. For us to progress in America, they're going to expect the next new one. It is fortunate that Watermelon is now involved with Sire. If this new album does well on Watermelon, what happens is, certain acts get uplifted to Sire. It happened recently with The Derrailers."

Since launching The Good Sons, King has signed a publishing deal with Bug Music. "I've had a couple of covers of my songs. Carolyn Hester recorded *Watch My Dreamboats Sail* off the first Good Sons album. It's on *From These Hills*. Townes did a version of *Riding The Range*, totally unbeknown to me, with the Calvins, a bluegrass band from Nashville. It's not out yet. It's going to come out as a double A sided single in Germany with *Riding The Range* on one side and *Dirty Old Town* on the other."

"*Riding The Range* is going to appear on another album that is coming out in America. Townes cut about four or five songs for a new album which were never finished and those things will appear on it."

Why had King called his song publishing company Murdered With Kindness?

"MWK. Michael Weston King (*laughs*). I ripped off Terry Lee Hale actually because he's got *Tender Living Hell* as his publishing company."

As for his favourite memory of Townes Van Zandt, Michael King recalls, "The day of the Borderline (London) show, the last gig he ever played, we were at the hotel, and he said, 'Michael, come up to my room. I want to play you something.' He pulled out a little cassette player and put his version of *Riding The Range* on. I couldn't believe it, and that was fantastic."

For the record, Glitterhouse releases are available in the UK via Round Tower Records. As for the limited edition CD, *The King's Highway*, the mail order address is Gruner Weg 25, D-37688, Beverungen, Germany. Alternatively, e-mail Glitterhouse at: mailorder@glitterhouse.owis.de ■