

# More Than A Song are Iain Matthews, Ad Vanderveen & Eliza Gilkyson – Not Just Another Songwriter Project

## Part 1

Some thirty-five years a professional musician, after departing from Fairport Convention in early 1969 to become a solo performer, a prominent feature of Iain Matthews' ongoing career has the diverse range of side projects he has undertaken. Following the release of his debut solo album, "**Matthews Southern Comfort**," a band of the same name was formed, a partnership that lasted for around a year. Subsequent bands have included Plainsong – born 1972, and reformed once more in 2003, Hi-Fi and the *Sandy Denny tribute*, No Grey Faith. He has recorded duo albums with Dutchman Ad Vanderveen, Paris based American Elliott Murphy, and Plainsong alumni, Julian Dawson. While based in Texas during the nineteen-nineties he formed the trio, Hamilton Pool, and "**Return To Zero**" resulted. His partners on that occasion were fellow performer and occasional co-writer Michael Fracasso, and Iain's long time album producer/studio owner/songwriter, Mark Hallman. With the twentieth century drawing to a close, Iain decided to leave America, his home for almost three decades, and move back to Europe. Matthews settled in Holland in the spring of 2000, having just completed the initial sessions, in Texas, for what became the "**More Than A Song**" album. In Europe MTAS have released a studio album, a live album and a documentary DVD. The studio album has just been released in the States by Under The Radar Records [ <http://www.binkyrecords.com/> ], and I began by asking Iain about his More Than A Song collaborators.....

*When and where and how did you meet Eliza.*

While we were both living in Los Angeles. Her manager, Reavis Moore, was also her husband, and he was my manager for a time. In fact, he was my manager before I made the Windham Hill album [\*], because Reavis put me together with Mark Hallman and Eliza sang on that album. This would have been in 1987. Eliza and I kept in touch. I ran into her in Seattle one time, when I'd moved up there before I moved back to Austin. Then she settled in Austin.

*When and where and how did you meet Ad.*

Through Yvonne Elenbaas. She was running Rondor Publishing in Holland when I met her, and I was signed to Rondor for Europe. We became really good friends, and whenever I'd come over to tour she would help out – this was through the nineties. When I began thinking about moving back to Europe, Yvonne gave me access to it. She was also the one that made it possible for More Than A Song to come together. We talked about this *songwriting collective* quite a bit, and she was very enthusiastic about it. Then we started talking about "Who." We went through several names and she thought Ad would be a really good working partner for me. Before I even moved here, she took me down to see him play. I think that would have been in 1998. He was playing solo in Amsterdam and it was an Irish place. I was instantly taken by his songs, his stage presence, his voice and his style. It was one of those moments where I could instantly see us working together.

*Where had the idea for the "songwriter collective" come from.*

I was looking for something different to come back to, in Europe, rather than just playing solo. I didn't want to carry on playing solo. I came up the idea of the three writers – and Yvonne really helped facilitate it. Once Ad and I got together, we started thinking of about a third person and I got in touch with Eliza and she was interested in participating. We made a plan to meet in Texas and do what was originally thought of as *try out* demos, but what ultimately became the first half of the album. We knew right after we had done the first song, which was "Bird Of Paradise," that we had something special – and that they were going to be more than demos.

*Is there anything that you particularly recall about the Swine Lake [#] sessions with More Than A Song.*

I remember feeling how special they were at the time, and how easy it all was. How we gelled so effortlessly. It was just so simple. We just pooled our energies and it came together.

*Was that the first time that Ad had met Eliza, let alone all of you singing together.*

Yeah. Exactly. It all happened at the house on that morning.

*How long did the Swine Lake sessions last.*

About a week. Yvonne and Ad came over and brought his recording equipment with him, and Eliza brought the same stuff and we hooked it all together and rented some other equipment. Borrowed some microphones from Mark Hallman.

*How many songs were cut at that stage.*

Six of them. I think we did two each. We tried a couple of other things but we didn't record them.

*Had it always been part of the plan, that the real recording sessions would take place in Holland.*

Not necessarily. The idea was to take those tracks back to Holland and figure out what we were going to do with them. I think the initial plan was to try and sell them to a label, then Yvonne and I got the idea of starting Perfect Pitch [S] over in Holland, making a label deal with somebody and becoming a production company. Because of work commitments, it became obvious that if we were going to finish the album, it had to be done in Holland. It wasn't pre-planned to do it there.

*The liner states that the second MTAS recording sessions took place in "in a hut near Norg." Tell us more.*

They have holiday parks all over Holland and some of them are modern, and some of them are quite funky. This was quite a funky one, with log cabins. We rented two cabins. One of them became the recording studio and the other was set up as a living space. Those sessions took about a week – maybe ten days. Eliza came over and, to make it viable for her, we booked some dates for her. She would go off to play a show and Ad and I would work on the tracks. We'd record with Eliza, from 11.00am until 4.00 or 5.00pm. The Dutch sessions were done about the same time the following year, because I recall that there was snow on the ground.

*Everybody contributed five songs to the album, so it seems totally democratic.*

Well that was the plan.

*Once you completed the sessions and the fifteen songs were recorded, was the plan to put it out on Perfect Pitch.*

By that time we'd a label deal with Coast To Coast. We, meaning Perfect Pitch, were committed to putting out three albums a year. That became the first one [>].

*When you were cutting the second half of the album at the cabin, was that when you began discussing touring together.*

There was going to be more than one tour. We were going to try and make this a semi-permanent thing. Eliza had negotiated a solo deal with Red House and then she began backing out of some of the tentative agreements for More Than A Song. It was like pulling teeth to get her to do the Dutch tour. The UK and Scandinavian tours had to be shelved.

*"More Than A Song" has just come out in the States on Under The Radar, a subsidiary of Binky Records.*

On and off, I've worked with Chris Maxwell as a promoter in the Louisiana area for about....ten or twelve years. I got to know him quite well. I would stay with him when I was working in that area. He's a dear, dear friend. It hasn't been feasible for me to work with him in the past, but now that I'm here his label is perfect. It's a small label, and he's the only person that runs it. He's very motivated, full of good ideas and as honest as the day is long.

*Binky does have a certain reputation for releasing the work of thoughtful songwriters.*

Yeah, he released all those Oklahoma songwriter albums. I didn't want to be on a label called Binky, so we just brainstormed and I came up with the idea of Under The Radar. UTR. He registered it and formed it. Primarily it's a label for myself and Ad.

*The UTR version of "**More Than A Song**" has seventeen tracks instead of fifteen.*

Yeah. Chris just wanted to have a little added attraction, so we gave him a couple of live things to put on it. It would have been silly to drop anything.

*Is the "Lamb In Armour" cut on the UTR disc, the same version as is on the DVD.*

It's a different recording, but it's from the same tour.

*What do you recall about the trio's tour of Holland in February 2002.*

I just recall it being immense fun and extremely musical and incredibly rewarding. We had such a great time doing it and it was of such a high quality. We got a great response from it. And of course, a live album which is a great memento, plus a DVD. Including warm ups, we did twenty-seven dates.

*By that stage did you know that this would be Eliza's only tour with More Than A Song.*

It wasn't absolute at that point. She'd hinted that she needed to focus on her solo career, and that she wasn't crazy about touring for long periods in the future, but she hadn't actually said that she was out. That came later.

*Is there a future for More Than A Song at this time.*

Absolutely.

*With a third person.*

We still have to do, again, the *try out* recordings. I'm hoping that we'll get to do that in October when she is over touring in Europe, before she goes home to Canada.

*To be continued*

[1650 words]

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## **More Than A Song are Iain Matthews, Ad Vanderveen & Eliza Gilkyson – Not Just Another Songwriter Project**

### **Part 2**

This week Iain Matthews continues talking about his latest musical side project, Mote Than A Song. He starts by recalling their February 2002 Dutch tour.

*You had a percussionist accompany you on the Dutch tour.*

Yeah, Eliza's son Cisco. It worked out great, and he came through beyond our wildest dreams. He was initially hired as a percussionist, and a helper for our sound guy. He ended up running the monitor mix

and playing percussion, and helping the soundman with all the equipment. He was A1, and a good drummer to boot.

*Did you just record the final gig at the Kleine Komodie Theatre.*

No. I think we started around half way through the tour and recorded at least a dozen shows. Early on, we had been recording little bits on my mini disc machine, and playing them back the next day to see if we could iron out little kinks. We were surprised at how good those recordings were, but it wasn't until about half way through that it dawned on us that we could record a live album. That's when we started recording everything. Even at that point we didn't record it on a decent machine – we were still recording entire shows on mini disc. It was only the last eight or nine dates when Ad started bringing his hard disc recorder in and adding ambient microphones and everything. It wasn't till the last two or three shows that we got everything right sound wise. It just so happened that, at the very last show, it all was perfect in every aspect.

*How long were the More Than A Song stage shows.*

A couple of hours and Cisco was onstage almost all the time.

*When did the idea for the DVD crop up.*

That was Yvonne's idea. She – the guy that did it was her cousin. He's quite a well-known pop video maker in Holland. She'd been talking to him and he happened to have some time off, and came along to a show, saw us and said, *"I'd like to make a little documentary of this tour."* We talked some more and he came to three shows, filmed them and then put his documentary together from that. It's implied that the whole thing was done at the Kleine Komodie by having all the interview footage there. A lot of the sound-check clowning around stuff was done in other theatres.

*I was curious as to why the DVD wasn't around an hour long, with more songs.*

Because that was what he chose to do and we just left him to it – to do whatever he wanted.

*Toward the end of the tour you knew you were going to record a live album and were also making a documentary DVD. How come they ended up on separate Dutch labels.*

Because Turtle Records who go through Universal in Holland, were not interested in doing the DVD. They only wanted the CD. The artwork was Turtle's idea. All the Turtle albums look exactly the same, and ours is the only one that is not jazz - they are a jazz label. They press everything in Super Hi-fi, that's their thing. All the booklets are exactly the same – they're like a small hardback book with a black surround and a picture in the middle, and similar content inside as ours. We knew basically what it was going to look like, we just didn't know what pictures they were going to use and what the layout would be. We did know what the cover picture would be, because that's what we told them we wanted.

*Which the bare stage with the instruments set up.*

Yeah. That photograph was taken at the Kleine Komodie in Amsterdam.

*Who came up the idea for the individual liner notes where you comment on Eliza, and Ad talks about you and Eliza talks about Ad.*

They asked us if we would do something like that. We came up with the idea of each one of us writing about one of the others. It didn't take me long to write my piece. That stuff never takes me long once I focus on it. I also wrote the lead off notes, in the booklet, about making the recording.

*This disc is nearly seventy-one minutes in duration, yet you said the live show was around two hours long.*

I want to put out the complete concert at some point, with talking and everything, because I've listened to the talking and it's just hilarious. The stuff we have going between us on stage, is so funny.

*Does it enter the realm of being in-jokes among the group members, or is it something that anyone would get.*

Marly, my partner, listens to the complete concert and she listens mostly to the talking because she just loves it so much, because it's funny time after time after time.

*In terms of the thirteen songs that ended up on the live album did the trio have freedom of choice, or was it Turtle's ultimate decision picking the tracks.*

Yeah, Turtle/Universal told us, basically, what they wanted. I've got to say, I think they took out too much of the funky stuff and put in the pretty things. I think they could have done a lot better.

*To me, the sound is "hot" and "in your face." It is a very good live recording.*

Yeah. It is. I think that is what Turtle liked about it. They saw a good live recording and an opportunity to enhance it even more with their Super Hi-fi stuff. Turtle/Universal currently have the rights to release that disc anywhere in the world. I don't know what their outlets are like, because Turtle is under the wing of a company that sells extremely high end Hi-fi equipment. I mean extremely high end. Just by having meetings with them, they don't seem to know too much about the mainstream music business, which is where Universal comes into it. If you see it in Virgin and HMV that will be because Universal put it there.

*Will Universal bring the live album out in the States.*

They have six months to give it an official release in America. If they don't, then it reverts back to us and it will come out through Chris Maxwell, and we'll probably extend it. Make it a bigger package.

*To the extent of the whole show.*

That would be my choice.

*How does Inbetween Records, who released the DVD, fall into the scheme of things.*

It's a very small, independent Dutch record label. This is the first DVD that he's done. A couple of Ad's solo albums have come out on Inbetween.

*If you find a new, third person what does the future hold.*

I would hope that next year there would be another studio album. This year we are all busy with other things. Ad's got his new solo album and I'm touring with Plainsong.

## **More Than A Song – The Current Catalogue**

As I mentioned at the outset the **"More Than A Song"** has been issued in the States by Under The Radar. In addition to the fifteen studio recordings, the UTR version features "Lamb In Armour" and "Anchor" recorded during the trio's Dutch tour of February 2002 [See review in Pick'n-n-Grin'n]. The studio album is also available via Amazon.com, but please note that it appears to be the European version. By way of further confusing the issue, both the live CD and the 22 minute long documentary DVD are titled **"Witness."** The 13 track CD is currently available in the States via Iain's web site at <http://www.iainmatthews.com/> [See review in Pick'n-n-Grin'n]. Despite what may be claimed in print elsewhere, the DVD is only currently available in the European Region 2 format from Inbetween Records. It features the performance of three complete songs – "All The Way" [Ad], "Heart Of A Man" [Eliza] and "Lamb In Armour" [Iain]. Regarding the DVD, you can either pay by credit card through Paypal or by cash – in the first instance, please contact [inbetweens@hetnet.nl](mailto:inbetweens@hetnet.nl).

[1370 words]

### **Note.**

[\*] – **"Walking A Changing Line"** [1988] Iain's comeback album after a number of years in A&R, featured Jules Shear songs. Eliza sang the harmony vocal on "Alive Alone." Iain later contributed vocals to Eliza's **"Legends Of Rainmaker"** [1989] recorded in Austin at Mark Hallman's Congress House studio.

**[#]** – Swine Lake was Iain's home south of Austin, Texas.

**[\$]** – From 1990 onward, Iain occasionally released archive and new recordings on his own label, Perfect Pitch.

**[>]** – The studio album was released in Europe in September 2001.

Arthur Wood

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