

“this is a killer record.....KILLER!” Pete Townshend

THE STORY.....

Over three years ago, I commenced recording an album with my multi-instrumentalist right hand man, Andy McKerlie. After initial attempts were deemed unacceptable, I was looking for inspiration. It came in the form of a Ronnie Lane CD called ‘Kuschty Rye- The Singles’. Kuschty Rye subsequently became the name of the project and the band. After thoroughly absorbing this recording, I managed to get hold of Ronnie’s first Slim Chance album “Anymore For Anymore”. To say that this was the light bulb moment is an understatement. I’d prefer to call it a nuclear explosion. The glow was vibrant and the future looked bright.

I soon decided that the project should be a trilogy which would mirror the three Slim Chance records. The first part of the trilogy being a reflection of the ‘Anymore For Anymore’ album. In order to give the new work a ring of authenticity, I decided to try and enlist the help of some of the original Slim Chance members. As a consequence, I had to do a great deal of research into who all the band members were. I needed to know where they recorded, how it was recorded and what kind of equipment they used. I also recruited rising star producer, Andy Bell to steer the project.

Initially I found American keyboard player Billy Livesy who gave me some information as to how the songs were recorded at Ronnie’s Fishpool Farm; in the barn, and on the hillside behind the farm cottage. He suggested that I contact Russ Schlagbaum and Benny Gallagher. I was already onto Benny and he regaled me with similar recording tales. I subsequently booked Benny to do a live show at a local arts centre where I cheekily asked if he’d play on the record. He agreed, but his contribution didn’t transpire until much later in the process, because of his tour schedule at the time. Meanwhile I had contacted Slim Chance members; Charlie Hart and Steve Simpson. I sent Charlie seven songs. After his initial dismay at how many tracks he had to work on, Charlie agreed to play on what he could because he really liked the material. Steve and Charlie were reunited at Charlie’s Equator Studios and, thankfully they played on pretty much all of the songs I had sent.

Meanwhile, we had, by means of a friend, a contact channel through which I could directly approach Ronnie’s old pal, Pete Townshend. We requested permission to send the mixes as they stood and Pete replied positively. After Pete had listened to these mixes, I was overwhelmed by his response. His e-mail to me contained the now legendary quote “this is a killer record....KILLER!” Needless to say, we were somewhat spurred on. What followed was an invite to Pete’s Richmond mansion where he and I sat in his studio as I personally played him the mixes! He was knocked out by the accuracy with which we had nailed the Ronnie Lane sound, and remarked how we’d managed to capture some of Ronnie’s energy and sweetness.

Whilst all of this was going on I was doing research into where Ronnie had lived and recorded at that time. I booked myself, my wife and a bunch of friends into the Sun Inn at Norwood (near Fishpool Farm) in order to spend a celebratory birthday weekend in the area around Ronnie’s old stamping ground in Shropshire. Charlie had

told me beforehand which pubs to visit, the potential people to meet and where they all used to drink back in the Slim Chance days. I ended up finding Ronnie's old place at Fishpool Farm and after knocking on the door, the current residents' friendly reaction was "I bet you want to look around? No problem." To my delight we were given a full tour of the whole place including the barn studio that still exists. This really helped me get a feel of the place and how it must have been at the time. Little had changed. I reported back to Charlie, Steve, Benny and Pete Townshend and furnished them all with photographs of my Fishpool foray.

Subsequently, Charlie suggested and arranged contact between myself and Ronnie's second wife Kate (she was instrumental in the events that occurred during the time that they lived at Fishpool). This resulted in a wonderful visit to Bishops Castle where I met Kate and Ronnie's two sons, Luke and Reuben. I requested and received their blessing for the project.

Earlier in the recording process, I had tried to contact Ian McLagan through his management company to ask if he too wished to contribute to the album. Unfortunately, he was unable to participate, due to other commitments. However, Ian's manager did put me in touch with Ronnie's widow, Susan. This meant that I could ask her for permission to use Ronnie's songs on the album and also for her approval of the project. She was extremely supportive and freely offered me the choice of any of Ronnie's songs from the Slim Chance catalogue. Overall, she was very pleased that we were flying the flag for Ronnie. Also through Susan, I got interest from Burnside Distribution in Oregon.

Through highly respected writer/author/music reviewer Brian Robbins, we've also gained another contact into a potential foothold in the US. Brian writes for the influential NYC magazine Relix and is doing cartwheels over the record and project. He says that he cannot wait to put pen to paper once the album is on sale in America.

The first album by Des Horsfall's Kuschty Rye, entitled 'The Good Gentleman's Tonic', was released in May this year on the Valve Analogue Recordings label and is available in the UK through Proper Music Distribution.

"First pass through 'The Good Gentleman's Tonic' made me grin like a fool, put a tear in my eye and even made the hair stand up on my arms. Nothing has touched my heart like this album. What was needed wasn't someone who did a good imitation of Ronnie Lane, or was handy with a resonator- it's the soul, the vibe, the spirit of the little bugger...and Des Horsfall has nailed it completely in this bunch of songs".

Brian Robbins (Relix Magazine USA)

