

MAC MACLEOD

THE STORY OF A PSYCHEDELIC, FOLK-ROCK FOOT SOLDIER

Welcome To ZigZag Land

On a wet July afternoon in 1969, a couple of weeks after the historic moon landing, I made one of those discoveries that literally changes your life. I was a 16 year old kid who didn't get on with his parents and hated school. I lived in the comparative backwater of Lytham St Annes (just outside Blackpool) but nonetheless was beginning to develop what my elders considered an unhealthy interest in what was loosely called the 'underground'. I listened avidly to John Peel's Top Gear and Night Ride radio programmes. My record collection consisted of a few albums by the likes of the Cream, Fairport Convention, Pink Floyd, Tyrannosaurus Rex and a big pile of singles (tons of Move, Hendrix, Who etc, oh and the first releases on the Harvest label). I devoured the MM, Disc & Music Echo, Beat Instrumental and when I could get 'em copies of IT and OZ.

I had a few hours off that afternoon from a horrendous

summer job, scrubbing pans at a local hotel and with a few bob in my pocket I headed over to the Carnabique in St Annes. Now the Carnabique as its name implied stocked the latest Swinging London fashions - shirts from Mr Fish etc - though by then I'd already ditched my 1968 'dandy' phase for tie-dyed denims and grandpa vests. However the Carnabique was more than just a stockist of the latest hip gear, its owner also peddled a line fitting out local bands with the latest 'quipment (remember WEM PAs?) and he also employed some of the most attractive girls in the area as his assistants!! Plus the boutique sold copies of nearly all the underground press. Could one ask for more?

That afternoon, I huddled in the doorway to get out of the rain and peered into the front window. Something caught my eye. There nestling next to the latest issue of Gandalf's Garden was a black'n'white publication with Frank Zappa on the front cover - above Uncle Frank blazed the legend - ZigZag The Rock Magazine. Something inside me

clicked. I forgot about what I'd come to buy, went into the shop and handed over half a crown (2/6, that's about 12 1/2 p nowadays). With the mag secreted safely under my jacket out of the rain, I scurried back for the evening shift of my two-bit job but on the way home that night, I sat on top of the bus and devoured its contents.

The effect was like being given a map or a key to a secret kingdom - for the next few years, the monthly appearance of ZZ became one of life's biggest pleasures and it took me on its swirling ship away to a garden of unearthly delights. Through its pages I discovered Jack Kerouac, Compendium Books, the San Francisco Sound (oh not the Airplane but Ken Kesey, the (original) Charlatans, Quicksilver Messenger Service et al), folk music, free jazz and all manner of esoteric 'grist' as ZZ's esteemed editor might've coined it! To wit I learned to look at music in the bigger context.

Now one of the more appealing aspects of the mag was its very strong sense of regional identity.

Unlike other members of the underground press, ZZ emanated from north of the capital, first from Caddington, a conurbation between St Albans and Luton, then from North Marston, a village north of Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. ZigZag flashed with local colour - there was the St Albans contingent who wrote for it such as poet Jeff Cloves, and there was the city of Luton from whence came its editor and which in 69 was basking in the glow of producing the likes of Blodwyn Pig and Jethro Tull, two of my then current faves! The mag had close ties with Aylesbury Friars club too, one of the great rock venues of the late 60s and 70s. Its early pages were littered with the names of local music acts - Sweet Slag, Mick Softley, Gothic Horizon, Shadowfax, and of course Donovan who'd grown up in nearby Hatfield and Welwyn and cut his musical teeth in the folk clubs around St Albans and Hemel. Though nobody actually drew the boundaries, it really did seem as if a ZigZag Land did exist out there back then.

And that dear reader - if you'll excuse such a long-winded introduction - is where the subject of this epistle comes in - he was a mainstay of the early ZZ,

wrote for it, helped distribute it from his house and when the going got rough even appeared at benefits for it. But we're getting way ahead of ourselves. Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce one of the great forgotten figures of that decade known as the 60s:

Mr Keith 'Mac' MacLeod

Now Mac came into the world on 9th July 1941 - though his mum actually officially registered the birth as the day after! Interestingly enough Mac was an exact contemporary of Bob Dylan who arrived some six weeks earlier half-way across the world in Duluth, Minnesota on 24th May. Curiously both were born if you believe in the Chinese horoscope, in the Year of the Snake! Years later as teenagers, they'd both be snorting up the same influences - Woody Guthrie, Rambling Jack Elliot and Derroll Adams, not to mention the many key American black blues musicians. It was the dark days of World War II, Pearl Harbour was still months away - Mac however was born in the comparative peace of the Roman city of St Albans. Some 20 miles to the south, London was copping the worst of the Blitz. His was a fairly standard childhood and aged 11, just as

the 50s were starting, he attended the local Verulam Grammar School where his best mate was Jim Rodford, later the bass player for Argent and the Kinks.

It was the era of the Cold War and McCarthy witch-hunts, the term 'teenager' was yet to be invented but the world was about to be blown off its hinges by the advent of rock'n'roll. Mac was yet to be bitten by this insidious music bug and instead of pursuing higher or further education decided to 'see the world' and joined the Merchant Navy - a route favoured by other soon-to-be-famous Brit rockers like Viv Stanshall. However it was whilst facing the might of the North Atlantic that young Mac first got to really love playing the guitar as one of his shipmates taught him loads of old songs. Eventually life aboard ship began to seem dull, and Mac hankered after dry land so he headed back to the old hometown, finding a bedsit in Lemsford Road.

Early (Folk) Scenes

Kids had found Elvis and Little Richard and there was a homegrown DIY craze going down called 'skiffle' spearheaded by the inimitable Lonnie

Donegan. Fans were tracing its roots back to the American folk blues - the blues had first been introduced to English audiences through Chris Barber. Though first and foremost a jazz musician, Barber was the first bona fide British musician to acknowledge Blues as a valid musical genre and in the 50s sank a lot of his own money into bringing over acts to tour such as Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee, whilst his own band would give birth to the whole British blues movement nurturing father figures such as Alexis Korner, Cyril Davies and Lonnie himself! Meanwhile the likes of Big Bill Broonzy and Leadbelly (Huddy Ledbetter) were about to inspire a generation of guitar-pickin' kids - the soon-to-be-influential Wizz Jones and Davey Graham being two such early victims! Mac was another!

It was 1960 - Teds were in full swing, whilst the student/high-brow, ban-the-bomb brigade favoured New Orleans trad jazz and kids inbetween dug skiffle and emerging pop bands like the Shadows. The folk scene was also happening - in nearby Hemel Hempstead there was a club called the Spinning Wheel operated by the larger-than-life

Mick Softley who also doubled as the club's resident singer. Like Wizz, Softley was one of the first British beatniks to hitchhike the world with his trusty guitar under his arm. In Spain he'd fallen under the spell of the late Alex Campbell and soon found he had a talent for writing songs. Mac was intrigued and even took a few lessons from the charismatic Softley - a figure who, as we'll see, zigzags in and out of this story at various key points.

St Albans also had its venues - whilst the Peahen on the corner of London Road and Holywell Hill tended to pull in a more traditional English finger-in-the-ear crowd, the Cock on the corner of St Peter's St and the Hatfield Road was a real den of iniquity. Alcohol was still everybody's favourite high but already dope was becoming popular with the hipper elements. The Cock attracted all manner of loonies with great names like HiFi Hughie, Dozey and a harmonica-wailing baker called Roy Sheppard! Softley was a regular face too. Other residents included Pops Kerr, later singer with the Bonzos, the New Vaudeville Band and leader of the enduring Bob Kerr Whoopee Band. Mac remembers the pair of them going down to all nighters at

Ken Colyer's jazz club in Soho's Gt Newport Street and Pops playing his cornet on the milk train on the way back to St Albans. The Cock soon became home to Mac who was on a daily diet of Jack Elliot who'd recently visited England and even played at Softley's dive in Hemel! Jack's eponymous 1961 Prestige lp was a constant source of material and inspiration for Mac and his mates.

Now another act that everybody loved back then who also proved to be an enormous influence were Sonny Terry & Brownie McGhee and Mac recalls him and mate John Lock climbing on to the latter's Lambretta and heading off up to the Manchester Free Trade Hall to see them perform. In the summer of 1962, the pair hatched a plan to go down to St Ives, strapped their belongings on to the back of John's scooter and headed west. There were still few motorways in those days and it was an epic voyage. Mac remembers: 'We got as far as just outside Torquay and we ran out of money for petrol - for everything in fact. We kipped on the cliffs in Torquay that night, somewhere rough and in the morning we had sixpence - a tanner - I said "what should we do with this?". He snatches it off

me and gets a cup of tea - I couldn't believe it! We were starving and he had to have his cup of tea! Then he split - he came back to St Albans and I was left there with no money. I stayed on the cliffs for three or four nights for somewhere to kip and then I managed to get a place in the YMCA, which was going up the ladder. I got a job in the butcher's, I had to be up at five at some ridiculous time. Before that I couldn't get up. I woke up without an alarm clock or anything, I was so hungry. I did this butcher's job for a bit, for a month or so. I didn't have any contacts in Torquay at the time, then after a bit, I made contacts and got this job in a hotel. Then I met Renbourn'.

Mac'n'Renbourn

Nowadays John Renbourn is regarded as one of the kings of the acoustic guitar alongside Davey Graham and his long time friend and Pentangle co-star Bert Jansch. Back in 62/63 he was just another unknown quantity. He'd cut his teeth in an electric blues outfit, Hogsnort Rupert's Good Good Band but like his contemporaries had fallen in love with the American sounds of Ledbelly and had settled on the pleasures of acoustic guitar. Like many other people I've spoken to in the course of

researching this piece, Renbourn's voice takes on a tone of high respect when the name Mac MacLeod is mentioned: 'he was very important...a pivotal figure'.

Renbourn was down in the southwest from his native Guildford - Mac hazily recalls that they met 'over a pint of scrumpy - cheap and effective - in a pub half way up the hill on the north side of the quay. He was into playing acoustic and I was immediately impressed by his playing, he had his style down already'. They fell in with characters like Harry Brooks and Maxwell Helier-Easley (who later became an expert on the Aeolian pipes) and 'the Liverpool crowd working the season, not all musicians, but into the folk and blues scene to a man'. The pair played and busked around town - a typical set would include 'Muleskinner Blues', 'Rake Ramblin' Boy', 'Green Back Dollar' and the ubiquitous 'Working On The Railroad', and renbourn was already doing a stunning 'Train Song'.

Mac headed back to St Albans at the end of the summer but the pair kept in contact and later recorded a session at John Rodling's little home studio in Cambridge Road - Mac doing

stuff like 'South Coast' and 'Cocaine' whilst Renbourn put down 'Angie' and the aforementioned 'Train Song' - it must have been his first recording session. The tape's languished in Mac's loft for some 37 years but may yet see the light of day.

In 1965 Mac got JR a gig at the newly opened Luton Folk Club and a few weeks later they set off on a little tour of the Southwest. 'We headed down there as we had a few contacts. We did a college in Newton Abbott which John's girl friend got us, Exeter and the Torbay area. We crashed on the floors of friends like in a house in Abbey Road in Torquay which belonged to a guy called Spud'. It was quite a tour: 'I remember waking up one morning and there was this gravestone, a headstone in the room and I thought, "God it's caught up with me at last!". They were doing an all-American set - John by now was featuring Jackson Frank's 'Blues Run The Game' and 'at one gig we got into a punch-up because it wasn't English, finger-up-their-arses stuff!' Indeed they drank so much whiskey on the tour that Mac had to flog his guitar, they were so broke!

The Mod culture for whatever



Donovan

Now I can't imagine that there isn't a *Terrascope* reader out there who isn't familiar with at least a section of Donovan's staggering body of work from the 60s before he 'cleaned up'. However the troubadour's history may be less well known so here quickly is thumbnail sketch of the wunderkind that's relevant to **our** story. Some five years younger than Mr MacLeod, Donovan Leitch was born in Glasgow but moved down to the 'home counties' in 1956 when his family settled in Hatfield, hence the disappearance of his Glaswegian accent!! Don was initially swept up in the burgeoning Mod scene of 63/64 and became firm friends with St Albans/Watford r'n'bers, Cops'N'Robbers.

reason failed to hold his attention for long and he began to gravitate towards the more beatnik side of life. Like Mac and many others he was absorbing all the influences mentioned above as well as work by Rev Gary Davis and Buffy St Marie. But it was obviously Dylan who galvanised his metamorphosis more than anybody - anyone who fancied themselves a true folknik back then just had to have albums like *Freewheelin'* at the front of their record stack! (Don was in the audience at the Zim's Royal Festival Hall official Uk debut in May 64). And so it was, armed with his Zenith acoustic guitar, that the 18 year old began hanging out at The Cock where he'd sit in the audience and take in the deft finger-picking styles of Mac and Softley.

It was in the summer of 1964 (one I'll always remember for the *Animals House Of The Rising Sun* hit single) that Don and Mac's friendship was truly cemented and their destinies for the next 7 years forever intertwined. Mac had fallen headover heels in love with Stella Guy a waitress at the local Christopher's coffee bar and that June, he eloped with this black-haired teenage beauty to Scotland where they married in secret. Rather than return to St Albans directly and face the consequences, they decided to spend the summer in the West Country and headed back to one of Mac's favourite haunts, Torquay, where they had a bedsit in Abbey Road. By now something of a bohemian centre, Torquay attracted would-be folkniks from all over England and beyond, including two St Albans girls Vicki and Josie. They in turn were followed there by Donovan. 'I put him up down there', recalls Mac some 30 years on, 'I showed him how to finger-pick and clawhammer and he showed John Lennon!'. To keep the wolf from the door all five of them worked at a local hotel, the Conway Court.

It was something of an idyll. When they weren't waiting on, Don and Mac'd busk along the seafront or in the local pubs.

One of the songs the pair regularly used to perform was 'You're Gonna Need Somebody on Your Bond' which eventually found its way on Don's first album. Mac taught Don tunes like 'East Virginia' and 'Railroad Bill' and it was down in Torquay that Donovan wrote the song that was to launch his career, 'Catch The Wind'. But the summer eventually came to an end and they split back to St Albans.

That winter Donovan travelled down to Southend with the Cops'N'Robbers to see them play a gig at Studio 64, a club next to Westcliff Station. The band persuaded him to play a couple of numbers between sets - it was the fateful moment he had been waiting for. Stoned and nervous, Don left the stage after five numbers but had in the meantime managed to blow the minds of local svengalis Rodney Saxon and Peter Eden who were looking after the interests of the Cops'N'Robbers. Eden especially was so smitten, he immediately contacted his partner Geoff Stephens and within days the pair had become Don's managers!!

Mac meanwhile had settled into blissful domesticity with Stella - they rented a house in St

Michael's Court and Mac took a job as clerk at the Record Room in Chequer Street.

In early 1965 Pete Frame (future editor of *ZigZag* and Rock Family Tree innovator extraordinaire) and some mates decided to start a folk club in Luton. The idea was to have Donovan as the resident singer - however Don by now had management and a record deal and was about to become a regular feature on the great *Ready Steady Go!* tv series (the weekend starts here). Unable to help, Don suggested they approach Mac and so it was that on 20 January 1965 The Dolphin Coffee Bar welcomed the first night of the Luton Folk Club. Mac opened proceedings with a set that included 'San Francisco Bay Blues' and 'Hard Travellin'. For the next four months Mac would play at the club every week always slipping in all kinds of wonderful songs - he was not much of a songwriter so they were mainly covers. The traditional number 'The Cuckoo', a version of 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away' in open tuning, 'Riding In My Car' (which Mr Leitch later vinylised), even Buffy St Marie's 'Codine' - 'a great version', Mac jokes in 1999.

Catch The Wind

In the wake of 'Catch The Wind's monumental success on the singles chart Donovan went out on the road. He'd asked Mac to come and back him at the NME Poll Winners Concert that March, where in front of adoring fans they performed the hit and a couple of other tunes, possibly including the aforementioned 'You're Gonna Need..'. Manager Peter Eden was also handling band called the Jubilee Lovelies and suggested that their guitarist Graham Lockart play bass with them just for that show. Don was then added to a package tour that included Wayne Fontana & The Mindbenders and comedian Bob Bain who peddled a line in smutty humour inbetween acts, as the amps were changed over. After some rehearsals at the Marquee Club, the pair were thrown into the thick of it. Every night they played in front of thousands of screaming girls. No underwear was thrown onstage, recalls Mac, but they did throw lots of those horrible fluffy toys called Gonks (that were all the rage at the time). It was a long way from the rarified atmosphere of the folk scene. The set list included 'Catch The Wind', 'Josie' (written about the same girl he'd spent the previous summer with in Torquay), 'Candy Man', and 'Why Do You

Treat Like You Do?' and the ubiquitous 'You're Gonna Need Somebody On Your Bond'. John Lock and Gypsy Dave (who'd subsequently become an integral part of Donovan folklore) were the roadies who'd try and keep the kids from swarming all over the car.

Don's manager Peter Eden remembered, 'two guitars made a fuller sound'. And for tv and radio, Don would additionally employ a bass player, usually jazzers Brian Brocklehurst or Spike Heatley who'd 'give it more lift'. However the management was very selective about him doing live dates as Eden observed, 'There was an agent called Austin Newman and he'd get on the phone to me and say, "I gotta deal you can't turn down' but Don only did the ones that fitted - on one occasion he blew out an important gig to go on a CND march and we had to pay the money back. At the same time he had to earn some money'. Eden recalls the show Don did at the Finsbury Park Empire with the Byrds and Them and remembers seeing Jim McGuinn 'round the back afterwards jamming with Donovan and Van Morrison. Even then you could tell that Van was going to be a big star'. And Mac remembers him and

Don supporting Joan Baez at some flash nightclub in London. Peter Eden suggests this may've been the Cafe Royal - a charity bash for the Jewish community organised by Aussie Newman.

I was curious to find out why, since they were such good friends, that Mac didn't record with Don at this time. Mac observes that he was 'too precious to let me play with him in the studio, he doesn't like sharing himself, though he was at the sessions which Don did for his second single 'Colours' and remembers that Derroll Adams on whose playing style the song is based was also present. The parting of the ways for Mac and Don was now imminent - Don was being wooed by the likes of Joan Baez who introduced him on stage at the Newport Folk Festival that August and he was hanging out with the likes of Dylan (remember him in the Pennebaker film, *Don't Look Back* ?) and the now incredibly hip Bert Jansch, whose 'Do You Hear Me Now?' he'd include on his 'Universal Soldier' ep.

Dana Gillespie

Having packed his job in at the Record Room in St Albans, Mac got himself a gig supporting Dana Gillespie - Gillespie was a blues singer who'd later be

initiated into the Bowie/Mainman fold and record albums like *Weren't Born A Man* . She still continues a club career performing songs of a highly risque nature to this day and has even turned up as a Radio 2 presenter! Mac opines in hindsight, 'I missed out on recording with her too' though they were performing her single 'Donna Donna' in the live set.

Interlude (1965)

Everyone talks about 1967 being **the** year of the decade but things were happening thick'n'fast in 65 too. That summer barely a teenager I fell in love with a girl called Stella Wilkes - she was having none of it so I took shelter in Radio Carolina North which was blaring out life-changing records like the Byrds' debut 45 'Mr Tambourine Man' and Dylan's 'Like A Rolling Stone'. I wasn't aware of it but the folknik scene was developing at an alarming pace, too.

At Donovan's suggestion Pete Eden and Geoff Stephens had signed up Mick Softley and that year saw the release of some of his most personal and passionate work. 'I'm So Confused' was leased as a single to Immediate Records - a disturbing piece of anti-war folk rock with Mick's big-hearted

voice milking the song for all its worth, Softley coming on like Hemel's answer to Barry McGuire in the process! And EMI Columbia took on his debut album *Songs For Swinging Survivors* (Columbia 33SX 1781). Produced by Eden and Stephens for Eve Folk recordings, it's arguably his best work. It mixed Woody Guthrie songs like 'Plains Of The Buffalo' which had been in his live repertoire seemingly forever, with a couple of deft instrumentals that showed of his fluid flat-picking style to perfection. Indeed the title of one them was actually a send-up of Aussie Newman's aforementioned immortal line in business patter! There was also plenty of anti-war fervour as on the opening track 'After The Third World War Is Over (Or How I Learnt To Live Without Myself)' and on 'The War Drags On' which Donovan had learned from him and put on his 'Universal Soldier' ep. Stirring stuff! There was a superb rendition of 'The Bells Of Rhymney' which the Byrds did on their debut lp out at the same time - a perfect vehicle for his big booming voice. And 'West Country Girl' is a fabulous chugger that evokes the sense of wanderlust that seemed motivate them all back then -

Wizz, Mac, Clive Palmer. You can almost hear that lonesome whistle moan. It's all fine grist - just Softley and his guitar - and somebody really ought to reissue it at once! The sleeve photo incidentally was shot on the dump at Two Tree Island in Leigh On Sea in Essex, a mere stone's throw away from where I sit bashing this out on my wp!

And as discussed elsewhere in this issue there were the debut albums by Renbourn and Jansch which made such an impact. Some key American figures had also arrived in London that summer and had Soho buzzin' with their songs and charisma - figures like Paul Simon and Jackson C Frank and a young woman from California called Dorris henderson who'd soon be gigging and recording with John Renbourn (the reissue of the pair's *There You Go!* album (Big Beat CDWIKD 79519) is well worth checking out). And Donovan's debut *What's Been Did and What's Been Hid* lp issued by Pye in mid-May to coincide with the tour was selling like hot cakes!

Wizz Jones & Pete Stanley also had an album out on Columbia whilst north of the border Clive Palmer was getting it together with Mike Heron and Robin

Williamson in the Incredible String Band - a contract with Elektra Records beckoned. It seemed only a matter of time before Mac would be in there too, especially when he teamed up with local singer, Maddy Prior that summer.

Mac & Maddy

When I met Maddy Prior for the first time last September to research this article, her eyes sparkled as she said of Mac, 'he was the best musician around, his technique had more finesse than most people's...I was very honoured to play with him'. Now Maddy is known as the voice of folk-rock super stars Steeleye Span but back in the early 60s, she was still a school girl who hung out on the fringes of the St Albans scene. Born in Blackpool, Lancs, her Dad Alan had moved the family down to Hertfordshire in 1959 when he got a job with the BBC and established himself as a major tv scriptwriter.

Compared to the grim council estate where she lived in Bispham, St Albans was 'like a wonderland...I was amazed at how countrified it was', says Maddy. She began to attend the local grammar school and 'got involved in singing very



quickly...I was singing from about 14'. Maddy didn't however immediately gravitate towards the 'folk scene' - 'I'd been going to the jazz club at the Market Hall, though I loved dancing. My idea of a good night out was four hours flat-out dancing, three nights a week'. Indeed the aforementioned Roy Shepherd was an early dance partner of Maddy's at the Jazz Club! Still a young teenager, she was able to sneak into various venues courtesy of her older brother and remembers seeing Shane Fenton & The Fentones at the local city hall. The Cock was the next stage - 'I started going to The Cock at the intervals - everyone who had an

interest in music had loose affiliations with The Cock - Pops Kerr lived just down the road from us'. However, The Cock was one hang-out, the aforementioned Peahen was quite another. Maddy recalls her initiation into this more formal 'folk club' atmosphere as follows:

'The guy I was going out with at the time (Colin) Duffy - he could play three chords - they said, could he come and play and he said, "I'll come if she comes along and sings". We'd obviously already been singing but I can't remember which songs. They looked at me doubtfully and said, "Oh all right, if she must". So along I came". Maddy asked

Duffy what happened at a folk club and was completely crest-fallen when she learnt there was no dancing!! However she soon warmed to the idea as she recalls in hindsight, 'At the time it was the place that everyone went, all my friends went there, it was the social place to go...and cider was 1/3 and it was great, we all got terribly pissed on a half of cider! No, actually, I was terribly into vodka and lime at the time because it didn't smell on your breath!! It was great, it was really interesting'.

She soon got to know anybody that mattered and was rubbing shoulders with all the local 'faces'.

Mac she knew informally. Though they had yet to play together formally, he recalls an early gig at the Peahen featuring the St Albans Singers, a quartet that consisted of Maddy, Brian Pearson, a girl called Leslie and his good self! They'd mix their own favourites which were always American with those Pearson liked - he was a dyed-in-the-wool traditional English folkie in the Ewan McColl vein! By this time she also knew Donovan and she'd sit on the trestles of the Cock's barn bar and sing stuff like 'Stealin' with him. She recalls one of those great 'St Paul on the Road to Damascus' experiences which she shared with the pop-star-to-be: 'the first time I ever heard Bob Dylan was with Donovan and a girl called Sue Nightingale. It was a rainy afternoon, a Saturday afternoon, mooch, mooch, moan, moan - "we'll go and listen to some records", so we went to the local record store which was down The Chequers. Off we went and we were looking through the racks and Donovan said, "this guy's supposed to be really good", so we tramped off into the (listening) booth and the guy put the record on. The three of us crammed in. And this voice came on and we all just cracked up. We thought it was the

funniest thing we'd ever heard. "Don't be ridiculous!" We just kind of wrote it off and Don just said, "well I heard it was good". Then it came to 'Hard Rain' and suddenly these words just started to come through. It was extraordinary - there was image after image and they were so powerful compared to what other people were doing. I think we all bought it that week - none of us had the money to buy it that minute! I bought them all after that. He was always astonishingly interesting to me, just the imagery and use of words was so powerful. It wasn't about music as in sounding beautiful, it was about communication.....it was a revelation that words could be so powerful'.

Later on she got a scooter and was able to get to gigs farther afield under her own steam, such as in Hemel. She recalls Softley at the Spinning Wheel: 'He was a holy terror, was Mick! He used to get me up to sing. They used to have these barrels that you sat on - it was the smallest room. And they had a table with these barrels on the top - so it was like a stage rather than just sitting on the floor. So he'd get me up there - I'd sit up there and sing some stuff, then he'd go "The Good Ship Venus"'. He did it every bloody time and of course I couldn't get off. He used to just think it was the best thing in the world because I was so embarrassed - and I was trying to look cool - oh goodness it was awful!

Mac and Maddy however only got going as a serious musical entity in the latter half of 1965 - she'd go round to the MacLeod residence - in Fishpool Street in St Michael's and rehearse. The repertoire they worked up was almost wholly American - 'finger in the ear English stuff was boring', recalled Maddy in 1998 and indeed the only English trad songs they tackled were American versions. The set list drew on many of their favourites like 'Banks Of The Ohio' and 'Engine 143' - Mac remembers there being a strong Joan Baez influence but Maddy is quick to counter that Joanie 'was one and the same thing as Dylan...and the Dylan songs came back to us via Joan Baez'. Maddy favoured Carolyn Hester, Heddi West, and there was material by the immortal Dick & Mimi Farina, Tom Paxton whose debut alb for Elektra was causing a stir not only in the States but in the Uk too, and also a country influence was sneaking in via Earl Flatt and Lester Scruggs. And the all-pervading folk blues were

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never far away - 'I loved that Alexis Korner/Davey Graham record (3/4 AD).

Another tune that featured heavily in their repertoire was 'London Town' - a song wrongly credited to Tim Hardin - which Donovan'd demoed (it'd finally surface in '92 on his *Troubadour* box-set) and which Mick Taylor (not the Stones guy) released as a single on CBS. Pete Frame remembers calling round at the MacLeod house with his mate Mick Sullivan one day when Mac and Maddy were doing a home recording of this song: 'it was good, it was nice, Maddy was just singing on the choruses but was getting frustrated by Mac's perfectionism, 'Mac, be fair, we've done 83 takes, it isn't going to get any better!'. Later on the same day the pair took MacLeod off with the tape to someone to get a deal. Needless to say nothing came of it and the tape, sadly, has disappeared. However by far the coolest byword in hip in St Albans at that time was his Royal Highness of the Far Out, Lord Buckley - the first 'alternative comedian'! Tracks like 'The Gasser', 'The Hip Gahn', 'Willie The Shake' and 'The Nazz' were hot currency amongst Hertfordshire's hip elite, his expressions everyday parlance!!

They quickly cemented their reputation as a live act - aside from The Peahen, according to Maddy they 'played Potters Bar, Hoddesden, Hemel - they all had folk clubs. Everywhere had folk clubs. There was a folk club in a pub in every town. Other than that we'd go to London to Les Cousins, the Scots Hoose - that's where we crossed paths with Les Bridger, Don Partridge, Cat Stevens and Marc Sullivan' (with whom Mac also incidentally played). They even did a gig supporting The Zombies (St Albans legends) at Hatfield Polytechnic (thanks Pete!). So you could've knocked Maddy down with the proverbial feather when at the end of 65 Mac decided to quit the UK and head for Scandinavia! Fortunately the ever-resilient Ms Prior didn't cry over spilt milk and via contacts like Bill Leader soon got a job driving visiting American musicians round our fair isles, including Mac hero, the Reverend Gary Davis. 'He was great', recalls Maddy 30 odd years later, 'he used to say, "Miss Maddy, you'd make a great nurse!" - somewhere between a compliment and an insult in his vocabulary. It meant you had a certain level of respect but respect wasn't something that he really liked very much!'

It was her short tenure as a driver that spun her 'career' around. She was asked to ferry country musicians, Sandy & Genie Darlington round Britain - they also happened to be great collectors of English traditional songs. During the course of their visit, they told her, "Oh for God's sake, stop singing that American stuff, you do it dreadfully". Maddy recalls, 'They said it was crap. They said "Just sing English", and I said "Like what?". They said "Well listen to these tapes" - I was only 18 or 19 and they said "listen to these songs". They forced me to listen and I sort of backed into it! Pretty soon afterwards she met up with Tim Hart, discovered they had a mutual interest in traditional English music and the rest as they say is history!

Scandinavia

Things were going well for Mac - 1965 had been a great year but during the dying embers of that autumn, Harry Brook whom he'd known since Torquay days suggested he head for Sweden. 'Harry was going out with a Swedish girl, had travelled around over there, and arranged publicity and agents for me in Stockholm, it was an offer I could hardly refuse!'



There was a wonderful irony in his decision to head for Sweden - most 'beat routes' of the time lead in the other direction to the warmer climes of southern France or Spain and on down to Tangiers and Morocco - these were the paths trodden by the likes of Softley, Jansch, Palmer, Jones & co. Mac however was off

to freeze his bollocks off in a Stockholm winter - crazy!! 'I decided to split with Maddy and take a chance in Sweden. I had quite a few gigs lined up and went out there in December. It was really cold that winter. It was amazing: suddenly there was a lot of publicity and a lot of interest'. He decided to take along Mick Godard 'a drinker I

knew in St Albans' - and just as the ferry was about to leave, old mate John Lock jumped aboard too. 'I took Mick and him along for company', remembers Mac, 'but they just f***ed up from the word go'. Godard clashed with Lillan, a local guy who was acting in a managerial capacity for Mac and later managed Agnetha Faltskog of Abba fame - 'Mick knew nothing about the music business' - and within weeks he and Lock were back home. 'The pair came back and told everyone how bad I'd treated them but they were basically just freeloading. I shouldn't have bothered really!'

Stockholm certainly offered Mac a lot of possibilities - 'New Year's Eve I had three gigs through some English people I knew there. I got this guy to drive because I knew I'd be drinking and playing and going from from one club to another - I rented this Volkswagon. There were a couple of mates there and this Swedish singer, this girl who Boz Scaggs used to back as well and we were going from the second gig and I was sitting on her lap in the front. And the guy I got to drive, this English guy, he'd had

some drinks as well and the reason he was driving was that he should've stayed straight. And he was going down the main road in Stockholm and this cab pulled out in front of us - it was when they were still driving on the left and apparently you had to give way to the left even though it was a side road. We pulled out and went straight into him. I was sitting on her lap in the front with my guitar in the boot - I got smashed up a bit and got pneumonia. Everything was set up and I got a bit of a blow on the chest - I was in hospital for a few weeks. All the momentum was lost'.

Yet recuperating in hospital, it seemed Mac really had arrived even receiving a wonderfully touching and crazy get-well card from all the members of Swedish girl group, the Nursery Rhymes. They weren't the only fans - Mac met up with a fresh-faced kid Mats Olin. Still ostensibly a school boy, Mats was smitten by our roving troubadour and even had him perform songs every morning at school assembly (yeah those Swedes were certainly progressive - the thought of Mac playing my school assembly was unthinkable, it would've given my ex-brigadier headmaster a

f***ing thrombosis!!). Though Mac remembers it was quite a strain having to get up early to fulfill these unusual gigs - especially with a hang-over! Mats also took various photo sessions of Mac round the city and even shot two super 8mm films of him!! (I'd love to see these!) and later became quite a big star in his own right.

However much of the time it was a hand-to-mouth existence - 'I used to go up the university for food. A lot of the time in Stockholm I was skint - there no signing on or anything - and by then Stella had joined me. It was a struggle and we used to go to the university for cheap meals and got to know the people who were like minded. There was an American guy - Jack Downing - an artist - never seen an artist before who could draw such straight lines free hand so immaculately! He was very talented'. Gradually it began to come together again for him. It was at this time that Mac first committed himself to vinyl, recording 'Remember The Alamo' and 'Candyman' as a 7" single for Gazell. 'It was nothing outrageously original. I can't say I'm happy with it. I had a very straight producer. I was doing the b-side and there were these three male singers opposite me,

really straight - in those days, especially in Sweden, it was very formal in the studio'. The single was nothing to write home about, charming enough though sadly lacking real punch - the flipside was the Rev Gary Davies song which was by then a popular club favourite (Donovan had put it on his debut lp) whilst 'Remember The Alamo' was a tune Mac had learnt from Softley. But it did get some radio play and Mac some much-needed media exposure including some tv appearances, one which brought him back into contact with Joan Baez: 'snobby bitch - I got a complete blank off her. I thought she would've recognised me or just said "hello" anyway, even if she didn't. I wasn't coming on or anything but she didn't even have the time of day. I thought "Up yours, lady!"'.

Mac does have happier memories of another tv show: 'The Lovin Spoonful came to Stockholm and we did a tv special with them. It was done by this guy Peter Goldman who did 'Strawberry Fields' for the Beatles. He produced this tv special - Art Garfunkel and Paul Simon and others. It was based in the woods and there was this old steam train - my part was, I had the guitar in my hand and I

had to go up to the train, jump on the caboose, sit down and sing- can't remember if I mimed or actually sang it. Funnily enough I never actually saw the show. By then I'd gone to Copenhagen. I knew it was on and I was racing around Copenhagen looking for a bar or hotel with a tv in it. I still haven't seen it!

He also worked with a great punk band The Other Side with whom the aforementioned Boz Scaggs occasionally played bass - Boz was taking time out from his studies and bumming round northern Europe. He'd

eventually return home, hook up with Steve Miller and record that pair of amazing classic acid rock albums, *Children Of The Future* and *Sailor*. Mac recorded a 7" single as part of the Other Side whose line up also included the aforementioned 'Growlin' Jack Downing on vocals, drummer Sven Bjorn, keyboardist Dave Heinz and an English guy on bass whose name now escapes him - one of those gems that should they ever do a Scandinavian supplement to the *Pebbles* series, is a must to be included. The A-side was a rough'n'ready version of the then recent Dylan hit 'Like A

Rolling Stone', that owed more to the Stones 'Get Off My Cloud' than it did to the original The flip 'Out My Light' was another nugget, snotty vocals, wheezing Farfisa, dancing beat, a dirty performance all round!!

For some of his short stay in Sweden, Mac even had a manager, a Turkish guy with a thick Brooklyn accent - Sonny Egor! It was with Sonny that Mac first experienced the delights of LSD! 'He was such a hustler. It amazed me. There was this big plush hotel in the centre of Stockholm - the Grand - his father was a diplomat and he



THE PTOLEMAIC TERRASCOPE

happened to know the manager of this hotel. 'Bananas' was his nickname - "hey Bananas buy us a drink!!" He got me a gig in the nightclub there. It was when Don came over - they wouldn't let him in because of the way he was dressed! It really was a snobby place. I was doing this cabaret - it must've cost an arm and a leg for the people who went there - the sound was fine, the lighting was great and it went down well. I did the first number and Sonny went up to the mike and goes, "that was very nice but that table over there, I distinctly heard somebody talking" and gave them a complete bollocking because they were talking whilst I was playing. I've often wondered what happened to Sonny Egor - it was a complete hassle with him which was good in a way but it wears you down in the end. Sonny and my wife fell out in the end!

Probably just as well then that the MacLeods were about to move on. 'We were sharing this place in old Stockholm and this American came to stay, his grandmother wrote *Grand Hotel*. He was quite monied and he had this Porsche and was going down to Copenhagen. I connected with Boz Scaggs there - I had a chance of a lift there.

Stella was pregnant and we had the equivalent of 50 pence - five kronor I think it was - one address of this Danish guy I'd met in Stockholm - I took the offer of this lift, the sun was shining. It was June/July and I left all this work behind!. Aah, the call of the open road....

Copenhagen

England were about to win the World Cup but Mac and Stella were hundreds of miles from home, strangers in a strange land with just one address between them. Mac takes up the story: 'We had this one address - that was lucky! The guy I knew was a film director's son and he was into making films himself and was away in the south of France. His sister was in the old part of Copenhagen. She was at home and he had a spare room on the fifth floor of this very high apartment block - this little room, no toilet - the toilet was five floors down. The Danes weren't averse to using the sink for a toilet! So we had this room! His hobby was entomology - so he had all these insects - preying mantises, stick insects - and a couple of bunks on the side. You can imagine going to sleep on the first night there with all these insects on the loose, it took a bit of getting used to!'

'But it was the same as in Stockholm, you soon got to know people. There was this club called the Las Vegas run by this guy Walter Kleibel who later made it quite big in Denmark as an entrepreneur. He had some names down like Champion Jack Dupree - the audience didn't understand him. He was playing and it was going well and he asked for a beer but nobody understood and he got quite upset about it! There was this other English guy there who was a bit pissed off with me for coming down to Copenhagen - Ritchie St John. He had an album out full of great songs. I got to know him quite well'. In 1966 Copenhagen was a happening city with a strong jazz scene. It may not have been Swinging London or Amsterdam but people were pretty open-minded and Mac wasn't shocked to suddenly bump into old mate Mick Softley out there on a busking trip. Though they didn't actually collaborate, Mac remembers Softley in excellent shape, laughing, coherent and much less uptight than he was back home in St Albans!

Through agent Knud Thorbjornsen, Mac was approached to make a solo album. At this point Mac and

Stella were living with Danish journalist Karsten Grolin. The idea was for Mac to work with a Scottish producer Jimmy Campbell who was another expat. 33 years on, Mac is very dismissive of the results - he wasn't having a good time in the studio and the record was aborted never to be finished. A real shame given that to these ears at least the performances sparkle and ring with the authoritative stamp of a real master. What did get committed to tape far surpassed that Gazell single! The finished songs are a fine testimony to the solo MacLeod of the early 60s. 'I Get The Blues When It Rains' is a solo piece that sits somewhere between the kind of thing both Wizz Jones and Fred Neil were doing back then. Two tracks were given more ornate arrangements employing flute and percussion - there's a very original interpretation of 'Codine' with open tuning that owes little to the more orthodox interpretations of this Buffy St Marie song of the time. The same goes for the version of Alex Campbell's 'Been On The Road so Long' though Mac's voice seems to struggle here and there on this. Sadly there was also a backing track done for another song with a full jazzy rhythm section and sizzling organ that

Mac never put any vocals too, proving that the finished product could've made for a very diverse debut album. However special praise should be reserved for Mac's solo take on 'London Town' which just knocks the aforementioned versions into the proverbial cocked hat - both the singing and the playing make this a definitive rendition and had it been released at the time it would surely have had to appear on side of that fabulous boxed set *The Electric Muse* slotting in seamlessly beside the Renbourn, Jansch and Harper tracks!

However Mac was already heading back to playing in a band context. Through people like Ritchie St John he met a guitarist called Tony Weaver and they got together with an American blues singer Tom Bailey to form Exploding Mushroom - Mac was now playing bass and the quintet was rounded out by keyboard player Willi Jonnsen and drummer Simon Kopel who was later replaced by Erik Pohl. 'Exploding Mushroom did a mixture of original stuff and Chicago-type blues, it wasn't bad but it was an early group, again'. The band gigged fast and furiously through late 66 and early 67, Mac recalling a gig on

the same day his daughter Sascha was born to some outlying island where the group arrived so cold they couldn't even play their instruments! The Mushroom cut one 7" single - 'There Will Come a Day' was Dylan-damaged to the hilt, especially the lyrics whilst 'Give Back What You Stole (From Me)' was a curious item featuring a vocal that was reminiscent of Lou Reed (tho' God knows if they could've ever heard the Velvets so early on!).

Through the agency that booked the Mushroom, Mac got a gig as part of Peter Belli's backing band, the BB Brothers. Belli was a big deal, a kind of Danish Tom Jones/Engelbert figure. Mac joined on bass, completing the line-up was Jens Otzen on drums and Claus Boehling on lead guitar - Boehling according to Mac 'was incredibly good from an early age'. It was well paid, regular work: 'we did a lot of work with him, three months or so round Denmark. Claus and he didn't get on. Claus wanted to do his own thing in the Hendrix vein and backing somebody like Peter Belli didn't go down too well! It ended when Peter thumped Claus...'. Cream meanwhile came to play in Copenhagen - 'a whole new concept in playing, the sustain

and the clarity, it gave a whole new meaning to a rock band'. The three of them began to formulate plans to play as a trio in this format. It was the Summer of Love - there were 'lots of chillums, hash and acid around , and lots of sex. It was a great scene'.

There hadn't been many serious rock acts in the Denmark so the coming of this power trio really set the scene a-buzzing. 'I came across *Hurdy Gurdy* and thought it was a great name for a band but it took ages to convince Claus. He didn't like it to start with - yet later in recent years, he was the one who didn't want to let it go! We got our own equipment, I got a Fender Precision and we went round Denmark. We didn't earn much money but it was beginning to take off. We'd done this residency in Montmartre - we had a hip following. It was improvised. We were playing these gigs up to six hours a night so it was bound to get tight. Then I got busted!! I set up this hash deal - I was doing it as a favour, wasn't getting any money out of it - and got busted. I was put in a cell and spent Christmas '67 in prison. I was then put on remand and deported back to England. Whilst I was in nick I wrote to Donovan, well actually

to his new manager Ash Kozak about this band I had - Hurdy Gurdy'.

The Hurdy Gurdy Man

Back in Blighty in Feb 68 - down but certainly not out - Mac got his old job at the Record Room back and he convinced its owner Mark Green to bring Claus and Jens over. Green harboured ambitions to be another Brian Epstein and for the next 12 months would keep Hurdy Gurdy afloat, giving them money for petrol, food - 'we lived off brown rice' recalls Mac - and generally taking care of the day to day running of the trio. MacLeod: 'we got Rod Argent and Chris White interested to produce us - we managed to get a farmhouse down in Cornwall. What happened was, we went down on spec and had a search around - we found the archetypal country retreat that rock bands were into in '68. Before then I'd arranged for the band to go round to to Don's - he had a cottage in Hertfordshire at the time - in Little Berkhamsted - and we played on his lawn'.

'I'd been round to see him a few times before the band came over and he said he had this song for me called 'Hurdy Gurdy Man' -

he'd written it just for me and the band. And he saw the band play and it was like 'heavy metal!' And the idea he had for the song was celestes, voices and choirs, and a floaty feel which was completely at odds to the way Hurdy Gurdy were playing in that heavy, loud style. Anyway we left it with him and went to look for the place in Cornwall, and then within a month he'd come out with that recording of his with Jimmy Page on guitar in the same sort of style as we were playing! Thanks, Don!! (laughs). I felt a bit let down - he'd have lost nothing because he could've had the publishing rights - we could've done something with it. He went ahead, jumped the gun and put it out! I feel a bit jaded about it! The idea of his that Hurdy Gurdy Man was his idea - he took the name from the band and so I could consider myself the 'Hurdy Gurdy Man', I've every right!.....But it was a good single. One verse was written by George Harrison. That's what I like about the name 'Hurdy Gurdy', the way it trips off the tongue'

The band never did do anything with the eponymous song. Undeterred by this stroke of bad luck, they did record two numbers with the Zombie guys overseeing the session. Pete

Frame reckons 'Tick Tock Man' is a 'dumper song' - the lyrics certainly aren't anything to get excited about but the way the trio arranged and performed the number was something else. Written by Ritchie St John, the intro was sung and picked in inimitable folk-blues fashion by Mac and underscored by some tinkling xylophone before the band fell in properly with some skull-crushing rock moves lead by some super fast guitar work from Claus. Mac and Jens laid down a thunderous rhythm over which Claus proved what a fine guitarist he was - raga-esque and very reminiscent of vintage Hendrix and the Misunderstood and good old Cream!! Mac showed that he was fully adept at switching from folk-style singing to full-pitched histrionic blues-shouting and the thing comes to an end with some nice blasts of feedback. It was committed to acetate for Green to tout to interested parties. God only knows what they did with this song live! The b-side was to be a thing called 'Neo-Camel', a long instrumental improvisation that was the very essence of what they were about live but a tape of which I've sadly been unable to elicit from Claus.

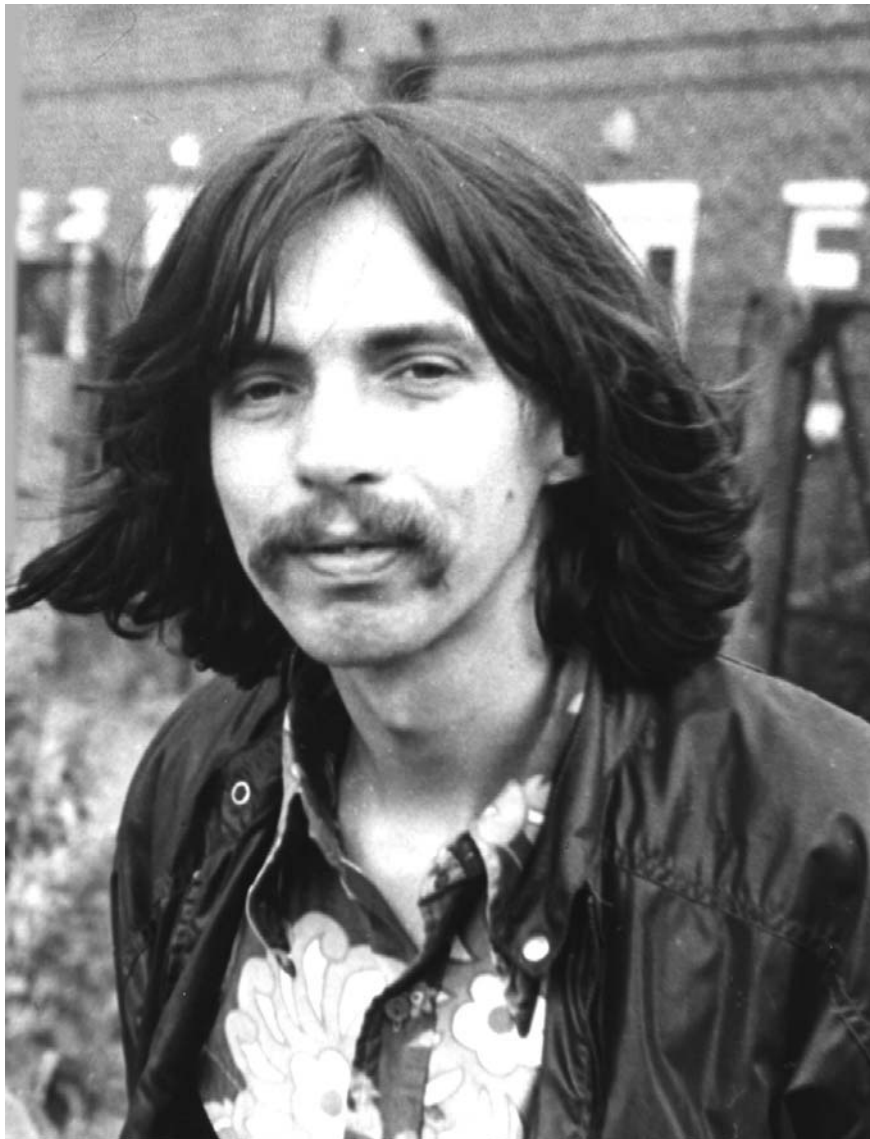
The band played a couple of Middle Earth shows in London's

Covent Garden - at their debut on 8th June, they had the bonus of Mick Godard's supernova liquid lights behind them: 'at the first one I met up with Dave Howson again, who'd been the manager of Exploding Mushroom, he did the Airplane/Doors gig at the Roundhouse and made a mint'. Headlining over Spooky Tooth who incidentally got paid more money the gig was reviewed in *International Times* by one Per Froem (aka Pete Frame) who according to Mac 'did it for me really'. The trio didn't play too many paid gigs at this time, mainly wild and wacky parties but they did play a second date at Middle Earth - 'Mark got the record labels down there. The sort of music we were playing was improvised and pieces could go on for half an hour. And that's not what record companies wanted to hear. They wanted numbers, they wanted four-minute singles. Getting all the record companies there at the same time, there wasn't much interest generated so we went back to the farm!'

Whilst Mark Green tried in vain to find a record deal, the band jammed and rehearsed 'down on the farm' in Morwenstow near Bude. Mac recalls with a grin that there was a young woman

who was staying with the band, 'probably a groupie' who used to dance on stage with them (Stacia-like) with 'a cigarette hanging out of her pussy'!! Unfortunately they also began to run foul of the Musicians' Union: 'we couldn't get a work permit from the MU. What they were saying was, being foreign they shouldn't be playing over here unless there was an exchange. Because they were foreign musicians, I should get in another guitarist and drummer. And the MU should be helping you, shouldn't they? It wouldn't have been the same band - what a ridiculous way to look at things!' Inevitably Claus and Jens were forced to go back home where they re-floated the band with a new bass player and recorded an album and single for CBS Scandinavia. Philosophically Mac looks back at the end of the band with some amusement, 'I always remember Mark had this acetate of 'Tick Tock Man' and the veins in his neck'd stick up and he'd go "this is the most expensive peiece of plastic I've got in the shop". What wasn't so amusing was that as band accountant Mac had the Inland Revenue on his back.....

French Row



And if you flick back through the pages of those wondrous early issues, you can see that Mac also turned his hand to journalism, penning articles on such figures as Zoot Money.

Rod Yallop was soon living full time in French Row whilst the mercurial Softley, back doing the rounds after releasing an amazing psychedelic single for Immediate ('Am I The Red On?') was also around, informally playing with Mac, Stella, Rod and Dave Howson as the St Albans Spontaneous Music Ensemble! A stoned

jamming trip allowing him to go off on mad rants all the time such as the legendary 'Dr Freud Incident'.

In the aftermath of the HG, Mac tried-out with the Crazy World Of Arthur Brown and the Election (with Kerrilee Male) - meanwhile the MacLeod residence in French Row was becoming a magnet for local long-hairs. On 16th April 1969 Pete Frame and his mate Rod Yallop launched *ZigZag (The Rock Magazine)* from nearby Caddington, though the first

issues were actually distributed from this epicentre of hipdom and issue 2 carried the request:

'If any top flight group wants a magnificent bass player/singer, phone Mac MacLeod 56.64273. Mac used to lead the Danish underground group Hurdy Gurdy and his virtuosity is staggering.....!'

Somebody else who made his presence felt there was Ginger Mills. Jeez, what can you say about Ginger that writer/poet Jeff Cloves didn't articulate in his beautiful ode to this Wild Man that appeared in ZZ1? Ginger was a gentle giant, a local

legend - he was born in Barnet and brought up by local nuns but eventually ran away. Not much more than a teenager, he joined Bertram Mills Circus and became a bare-knuckle fighter for them. In the 60s he was part of the St Albans alternative scene, frequenting the local beatnik (and later hippy) haunts, living in a tent or van (like Softley) and producing beautiful ornate leather work.

Later in that summer of 69, Mac and family and Ginger would turn at the second Isle of Wight Festival - the one which featured Dylan & the Band. 'we were heading down to Cornwall and we had Ginger with us - we hadn't planned it but we stopped off at the Isle of Wight. We left the van in Southampton and had to hump all this stuff on the ferry. We were planning on going camping for a long time - Mills was so loaded up, you couldn't see him for pots'n'pans! You had to catch a bus when you got off the ferry to get to the festival site - you can imagine all these pots'n'pans, cases, bags, bits of tent, sleeping bags! It would've been fun if it hadn't been for all this! Mills blagged his way into the press enclosure with the help of the stage hands and the Edgar Broughton Band - he dragged me down there with

him. It was really embarrassing - Ginger gave me a bollocking for not saving his seat during Ritchie Havens' set, Ginger's bit of grass!! It was an experience with Ginger but not all the time! Much to everybody's embarrassment, Ginger spent much of his time in the press enclosure haranguing guest John Lennon to give him his autograph. And Mac reckons he probably sold it when he got back to St Albans!

The Skye Band

But we're getting a little ahead of ourselves again. On Saturday 5th July the Stones played Hyde Park, their debut with Mick Taylor - Donovan was there and ran into Mac and another face from The Cock, Julian McAllister - a singer and poet originally from Hemel Hempsted who'd done stuff with Smudger Smith from the Cops'N'Robbers. In true Kerouac fashion, Julian had spent the last three years on the road in Turkey where he'd started to learn the saz. Don was looking to form a band for an American tour and by the end of that afternoon, it was decided that Mac, Stella and daughter Sascha would accompany the star up to the Isle of Skye to start rehearsals. Amongst the crowd also going along was Julian, Rod Yallop who intended to take

photographs for a proposed book about the experience and Candy Carr who'd play drums in Don's backing band alongside Mac. Mick Softley and his two kids even put in an appearance up there!

They stayed on Skye for two or three months, playing and working on things. Mac still has a set list after all these years: 'Superlungs', 'Way Down', 'Season Of The Witch', 'Ricky Ticky Tavy', 'Poke At The Pope', 'Chasing Tigers', 'Barabajagel's Brother', 'Fat Angel', 'The Love Song', 'Lonely Boy' and 'Mona Mona'. 'It was great apart from the midges', says Mac, 'it was good and healthy especially for my little daughter'. Donovan had an old school house, a couple of islands and a yacht with a full-time crew - 'the schoolhouse was great for rehearsing' recalls Mac, 'it had this big window which looked out on to the sea'. Donovan was on fine form 'into improvising melodies at the time'. So it was quite a blow when in time-honoured fashion Don decided to go off and do the tour solo!!

Soft Cloud/Fiery Dragon

The scene with Mr Leitch having once more turned bad - Julian, Candy, Mac and family returned to Snorbens. Since they'd

known each other for years it seemed the perfect time for Mick Softley to form a band with Mac - and so SOFT CLOUD FIERY DRAGON came into being - the combination of their surnames conjuring up evocative stoned images of American Indians and a thousand other symbols as the peace pipe was passed around the front room in French Row (not to mention the organic mescaline!). Joining them in this project in early autumn 69 was Candy on drums and his mate Mike Carr who'd been playing bass for DaDa Lives.

Softley provided most of the material - songs like 'Sunrise' (later the title of his first CBS album) and the epic 'Fiery Dragon' which seemed to be about the creatures in the pages of a children's picture book, but which on closer inspection were most certainly enhanced by the taking of copious amounts of lysergic acid!!! Other numbers included the melancholic 'Sing Whilst You Can' and the exceptional 'Time Machine', all about reincarnation, which featured the booming Softley voice ringing out like a bell! It'd later be re-worked for one of his CBS lps and also feature on the compilation *Superb Super Pop Session No 3*. Other numbers

included 'Warm Warm Sun', 'Train', 'Venus Rising' and the classic 'I'm Really Out Of My Mind!' Mac played some fabulous lead guitar which Frame reckoned far surpassed the playing on any of Softley's subsequent solo albums by the likes of Jerry Donaghue. As with most MacLeod projects this folk rock band got off to a flying start playing at the Roundhouse but soon enough the rhythm section began to tire of Mick's unpredictability and loosing the 'Fiery Dragon' the band were down to a duo. But it seemed to work and they played various local and club gigs, the highlight of which was a show at the Queensway Hall in Dunstable on Tuesday 14th October. This was a benefit for *ZigZag* and also featured the free-spirited English Grateful Dead (Mighty Baby!!) and Fairport Convention at the peak of their short-lived *Liege & Lief* phase. The amazing poster for the event was designed by another head from that lose French Row commune, Squeak. Soft Cloud's set reached a suitably rousing climax when they called up a certain Ginger Mills - bouncer for the evening - to join them onstage for 'Remember The Alamo', a song Mac had tried more than once to teach the hapless Ginger who'd give up with the immortal words

'I can't do it...it's me throat, Maxie'!!!

Unfortunately Soft Cloud came to a sad end in early 1970 when Softley managed to finagle himself a three-album solo deal with CBS. Having done all the groundwork, Mac became the proverbial spare prick at the wedding and was 'surplus to requirements' as Softley and producer Tony Cox gathered some of folk rock's most famous names for the recording sessions. As a postscript Candy and Mike ironically returned to the Donovan fold in Scotland to become part of his 'Celt Rock' project and his band Open Road, the backing musicians for Don's first Dawn album *Open Road* (DNLS 3009) in 1970. In typical fashion Don soon went solo again but the quartet stuck together in the aftermath to make one delightful if low-key lp for the short-lived Greenwich label, entitled *Windy Daze* (GSLP 1001) in 1971.

Amber

Mac and Julian decided to work together, though it did cost Mac some valuable opportunities to collaborate with other musicians, one of whom was Colin Blunstone, whilst another was saxophonist Lyn Dobson, a veteran of the Brit jazz scene whose CV would boast working

with the likes of the Soft Machine, Nick Drake, Joan Armatrading, Third Ear Band and Mick Softley. 'He was interested in doing something with me. I made the mistake of taking Julian with me to his house - Julian's not into improvising at all and just wanted to play his own songs. This guy just wasn't into that at all. He stuck it out for about 15 minutes and then just disappeared upstairs! I never saw him again!'

Julian and Mac started to perform as an acoustic duo. Mac was once again working with the acoustic guitar and learning the complexities of Indian music, taking up sitar and tabla. He'd borrowed a sitar from Donovan which had once belonged to George Harrison. Julian meanwhile had stockpiled a formidable number of self-composed songs from his years on the road. They called themselves AMBER.

Amber never became fat rock stars but there was a lot of interest in them - at one point Brenda Ralfini at the Witchseason Agency wanted to sign em and their pastoral psychedelic folk rock would've made 'em perfect stablemates with the likes of the Fairports,

John Martyn and Nick Drake. Peter Jenner at Blackhill and Doug & Wayne at that fine Notting Hill hippy establishment, Clearwater Productions also found them work. (Forget Julia Roberts and that dreadful film of the same name - back in the late 60s/early 70s the Notting Hill and Ladbroke Grove area was the very bastion of the 'underground community' in London - home to 'Awkwind, 'Elp Yourself, the Pink Fairies, Quiver, Davey Graham, Magic Michael and loads more other bands) One gig they landed was to play the intermissions at the newly opened Electric Cinema in Portobello Road - and they'd also busk along the 'Bello or at Hyde Park Corner to supplement their meagre income. Aside from occasional big deals such as Implosion At The Roundhouse, Mac recalls that they were constantly doing benefit gigs!!! However they did land an appearance at the prestigious Dartington College - 'a bit embarrassing because they taught sitar and tabla there! The week before, Elton John (then unknown) had played there and not gone down at all well!!!'

Sets would include lots of Julian originals such as 'Sea Shell Rock

Me', 'White Angel', 'Earlie In The Morning', 'Sing On The Sunlight' and the occasional cover such as the Impressions' 'People Get Ready' or 'Lady Madonna'. They were even performing some MacLeod songs too such as "Pavements Grey' and 'The Alchemist' - Ray Cooper from Watford (not the Elton John sideman) was invited in to cover the percussion seat, freeing Mac up to play electric lead guitar, sitar, acoustic and occasionally flute, whilst Julian handled rhythm and lead vocals. It was gentle drifting melodic music that could go off into long rambling ragas. There were elements of the Incredibles, Jansch and Donovan of course, whilst the harmony vocals put one in mind of West Coast bands like the early Airplane and Maui-era MU. It was very 1970 - the band sat down cross-legged on an Indian carpet onstage! Anyone with a taste for Heron, America or Forest would've loved it!

One figure they did impress was former Yardbird and Renaissance man, Keith Relf. The ex-singer had gone into production and was very taken by Amber's sound. He took them into the R G Jones Studio in Wimbledon and produced three tracks in February 1971

including a version of 'Sea Shell Rock Me' and 'The Swan In The Evening' - there was talk of him actually joining the band. Sadly when he turned up at French Row to discuss the possibility, another visitor to the loose commune there, an individual with the unlikely name of Horny Trish was in the process of trying to jump out of a window and top herself. Now Relf was no stranger to hippy weirdness but found this all too much, made his excuses and fled.

When gigs were sparse Mac and Julian did a bit of roadying for Kevin Ayres - Mac was particularly impressed by the guitar-playing virtuosity of the the Whole World's bassist, a certain Mike Oldfield! He also got the opportunity to play with those psychedelic rowdies, Hawkwind: 'I knew the roadie from Hawkwind. He was from Hatfield. I wasn't really into Hawkwind's music at the time. I was at a loose end - their lead guitarist had been in a punch-up and couldn't play. They were short of a guitarist and this was the next day or day after that - they didn't have a guitarist for St George's Hall in Bradford. I didn't know their music let alone rehearse with them but I said "Sure, I'll take the bull by the horns'. On the way up there,

the sax player said that he'd got some acid - he didn't know if it was still ok but it was from an original Woodstock batch - and that I was welcome to some. I thought "well in for a penny, in for a pound" and I dropped this acid and it was **strong** !! Fleetwood Mac were topping the bill - I was f***ed to the gills - I played a Rickenbacker and just chugged away. I was on the band bus on the way back and there was just a complete silence - it was embarrassing. How could I have been so dumb? Not only did I not know the numbers or rehearse with them but I dropped this acid on top! It was a foolish move - I'm normally quite reserved in situations like that!!' (laughs)

Amber made a second tape of demos at Regent Sound in Denmanrk St and not even an offer to join the embryonic America could sidetrack Mac from his belief in the Amber trip. 'Dave Howson brought them over to St Albans to see if I'd join them and I turned them down...another famous Mac decision...I had so much faith in Julian then'. Sadly in 1971 Donovan wrote to Mac to reclaim all the equipment he'd lent Amber - not only the sitar but a couple of amps, two Rickenbackers, and a Gibson.

Mac still has the letter in his archive to this very day. Its appearance certainly helped derail the train. However Donovan's intervention didn't quite kill off the band as Mac recalls in hindsight, 'there was a ritual tearing up of a record contract in French Row, we held out for too much. That's what really split Amber up, waiting for a good deal and no money coming in!'

With another child on the way, and suffering from emphysema, Mac decided to hang up his rock'n'roll shoes full time and become a carpenter. Julian got together a full electric band but according to Mac, it didn't really suit his songs and he eventually split to live permanently in Spain. Over the years MacLeod has continued to play informally, collaborating extensively with local St Albans singer/guitarist Dick Moffat and playing harmonica and occasional guitar with various r'n'b bands. The good news is that he recently did an impromptu gig with Maddy Prior prompting him to finally formulate plans for a solo album. Meanwhile Shagrat Records are about to release a 10" of the best from the Amber sessions.

Mac has been testing the water with a few solo folk club gigs,

going back to his roots playing all those great old tunes like 'San Francisco Bay Blues' and 'London Town', and wowed a small but appreciative crowd at the Terrastock III Festival over August Bank Holiday. An hour-long set that took in references from his past-career including some Amber songs, a tender 'Young Girl Blues' and a string-breaking climax of 'Codine'. He's also done some local gigs with Jim Rodford on bass and son Steve on percussion and you should see em tear into 'Corinna'. It's earned Mac the soubriquet of the 'Ritchie Havens of Bernard Street'!

To paraphrase the Grateful Dead, what a long strange trip it's been - but one one that promises yet more to come.

Written and directed by Nigel Cross.

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MAC DISCOGRAPHY:

Solo:

Remember The Alamo b/w
Candy Man (GAZELL C-179) 7"
1966

The Other Side:

Like A Rollin' Stone b/w Out Of
My Light (Karusell KFF 664) 7"
1966

The Exploding Mushroom:

There Will Come A Day b/w
Give Back What You Stole
(From Me)
(Metronome B 1658) 7" 1966

Amber:

Pearls Of Amber (Shagrat ENT
008) 10" ep 1999

Selected Discography of Related
Items:

'Hurdy Gurdy' - Hurdy Gurdy
(Background HBG122/11) (cd
re-ish of their 1971 lp)

'Troubadour: The Definitive
Collection 1964-76' - Donovan
(Sony/Legacy E2K-46986)

'Songs For Swinging Survivors' -
Mick Softley (Columbia)