

Recorded at Angel City, Chicago during Spring March to May 1998 and remixed at Woodbine Studio, Leamington Spa during November 1998, 'Red Brocade' is Nikki Sudden's latest solo album. Continuing the inexorable upward spiral of his recent recorded output, both solo and with the Jacobites, it's an inspired work, combining imaginative arrangements, melodies that could pierce the stoutest heart and lyrics that veer from the romantic dreaminess of 'Broken Door' to the dark and twisted profundity of 'Scarred'. What I like about Nikki's songs is the way they convey a sense of knowingness and wisdom together with the melancholic ache of the born survivor who knows that the condition of life is one of loss and pain, all expressed with a lightness of touch and humour that never descends into self-pity or indulgence. The roster of top flight musicians around Kevin Junior and the Chamber Strings (Nikki's backing band on the 1998 U.S. tour, who will also be playing with him in Europe) are a revelation, and provide the level of musicianship and taste that allow the songs to shimmer and shine. Lush string arrangements nestle alongside country picking on the Dylanesque 'Farewell My Darling' and raunchy sax and guitar set the adrenalin pumping on the unabashed rock and roll of 'Countess', 'Tie You Up' and 'Take Me Back Home'. This is one of Nikki's best to date, and while still being in the tradition of the rock and roll troubador, it sounds fresh and contemporary with a sound that is polished but never cold or overproduced. Released through Glitterhouse Records, this is a warm, optimistic and remarkably focussed work from a man who has been known to dance upon the darker and more chaotic waves of human experience.

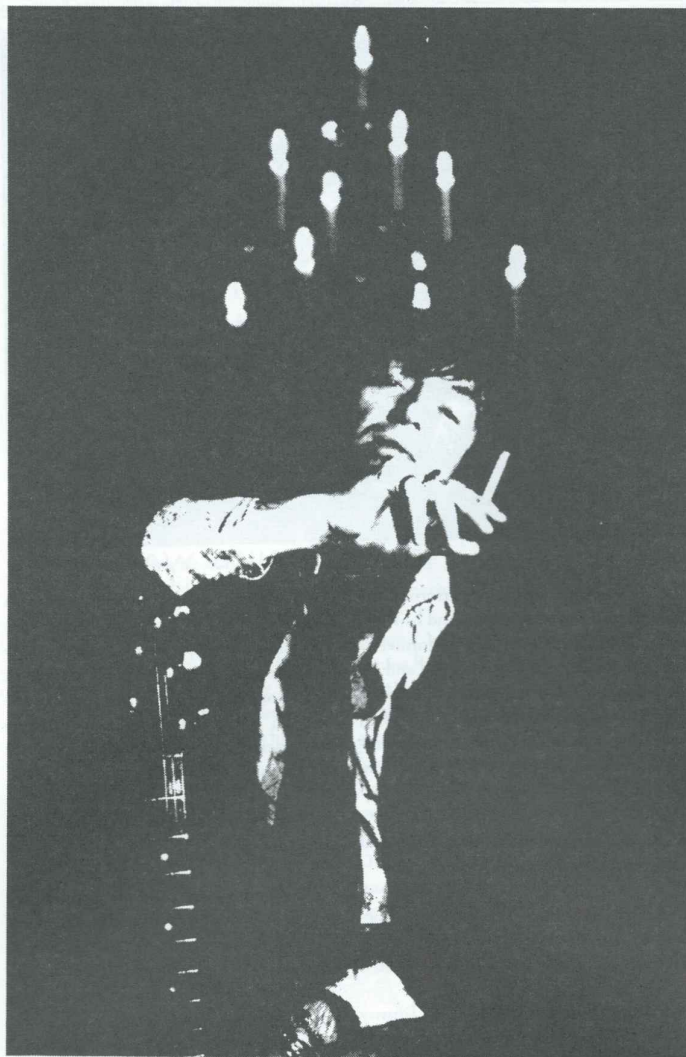
Ralf Bei der Kellen caught up with Nikki on tour in Germany during October 1998. This is what he had to say.

PT: This is the first ever solo tour that you've embarked on. Why did you wait so long to tour solo?

NS: I can't really answer that, it's something I should have done years ago. If I did one band tour and one solo tour a year that would make sense, maybe that's what I'll do in the future. My next tour is going to be with a band, that's for my new album 'Red Brocade'. Kevin Junior used to play with my brother Epic. Him and his drummer Anthony Illarde have a band called The Chamber Strings in Chicago, who played on my new album. I did an American tour with them this year, and they're coming to Europe to play with me. But that's a totally different answer (laughter).

Let's start at the beginning with my favourite question: What was the first record that you bought?

My first Single was 'Telegram Sam' by T. Rex, and my first album was 'Electric Warrior', which is a really good way to



NIKKI SUDDEN - Photo by Karen Kiska.

start, I think.

You actually met Marc Bolan?

Yeah...it's partly who you know. I mean, a lot of the people I've met is because a friend of mine, this DJ in England called Annie Nightingale, has been on Radio One since 1971, and she used to have her own TV-series in the 1960s. She's known the Stones since they started, and the Beatles since they first played in London. She was asked to go on the first Beatles American tour, but she'd just had a son, so she didn't go. Her son is Alex Nightingale, who manages Primal Scream.

Talking of Marc Bolan, did you get all those new CD's by Edsel, the 'Un-chained' series?

NS: Yeah, they're interesting, but I don't think they should have been officially released as the stuff's more suitable for bootlegs. They've done a 'Best of the Un-chained series', which has all acoustic versions on it, and they should have done all the electric songs, all the band songs, which would have made a lot more sense. At least they've packaged them nicely, they've done that well, which the Marc Bolan Appreciation Society did a really bad job of, they totally fucked everything up.

What was the first instrument that you ever picked up?

I had piano lessons when I was a kid. My father is a really good pianist, who plays organ in the church, so he got me to learn to play the piano when I was young. But I gave up when I was eight years old, because my favourite puppet series was on TV the same day every week I had to have my piano lesson. Which is really stupid, now I wish I had stuck to it. I didn't play an instrument again till 1972. I had started to like music then and I thought the obvious thing to do was to buy a guitar, so I bought one for six pounds, and it was terrible action, the strings were so heavy. And then I bought an electric guitar for fifteen pounds, which was a horrible bright-red Woolworths guitar.

Do you still have those guitars?

No, I sold both of them quite early on, and it wasn't until 1974, that I bought my first good guitar which was an Antoria Les Paul Copy... or maybe it was an Ibanez?

Were the Swell Maps your first band, or was there something before that?

Well, we always had bands, but we never

did a concert before Swell Maps. My brother Epic and myself and a friend called David Barrington, who became one of the Swell Maps, had a band called 'Sacred Mushroom', after a concert review of Marc Bolan, the headline of which was "Marc Bolan - Man or Sacred Mushroom?". I thought that was really cool, so the band was called 'Sacred Mushroom'. We just made albums in our bedrooms, on one Saturday we'd go to David's house and do recording, next Saturday come to our house and record stuff, and we did them all as complete albums, kept on retaking songs till we got them perfect, or what we thought was perfect - I mean, if I listen to that stuff now, it sounds so amateurish, well obviously it would do, but it's got a certain naive charm to it. The oldest thing I've ever released is at the end of 'Great Pharoah' on the 'Groove' album, there's a little coda part which is from a tape I made in 1974, at my grandparents' house. That's just some weird noises, I can't remember how I recorded that. We used to kind of double-track by getting a cassette machine, putting it next to the microphone, playing the tape and playing along with it, which could work, it was surprisingly effective and produced a very raw Phil Spector sound.

Where did all the Swell Maps members get their aliases from?

Epic [Nikki's brother, who died in November 1997] got his surname from 'Soundtracks', the CAN album, and 'Epic' from Epic records, I think. 'Jowe Head' was a name I christened him with one night we were going to Birmingham Town Hall to see a band, I can't remember who, and I just started to call him 'Jowe Head'. I wanted a name like Tommy Steele or Marty Wilde or Vince Eager, one of those fifties Rock'n'Rollers, so I just chose 'Sudden', and Nicholas is my real name anyway. And 'Phones Sportsman', which is a ludicrous name, comes from a TV puppet series called 'Stingray' by Gerry Anderson which was very influential on us... as was 'Thunderbirds' actually... Do you know 'Thunderbirds'?

No. (Tut!) You just can't get the staff these days - Ed.)

Everyone in England knows 'Thunderbirds', even now. It was originally broadcast in 1965, but the action was set in 2065, a hundred years in the future. I'd say the biggest influences on Swell Maps was T. Rex, CAN and Gerry Anderson, which is quite a strange mixture. But I think anyone who grew up in England in the sixties would have been influenced by 'Thunderbirds' and 'Stingray' and 'Fireball XL5' and 'Supercar', etc.

My favourite Swell Maps album has always been 'Jane from Occupied Europe'. I always wondered if the title had any significance?

The title came from an unfinished song of Epic's - one of his earliest. It was about a girl who lived in a cupboard during the Second World War (shades of Anne Frank). The cover picture for the album was taken in Richard Earl's parent's ga-