



P L U M M E T A I R L I N E S

PT: Where did the various members of Plummet Airlines get together?

H: We met through art college. What happened was, we had to make this film at college and for the film we required a band. We got hold of this local band called Orphan, we used to call them 'Awful' because they really couldn't play rock & roll. We couldn't either, but we were better than them so we formed our own band. We did the Art School Dance, as you do, and it just went on from there.

What year was this and what did you call yourselves?

H: It was 1973 and we were called The Brothel Creepers - that was the name of the band in the film, you see.

What was it, a ghost movie or something?

H: Look, *we* crack the fucking jokes... no, what happened was that Richard was in a parallel band, playing jazz - the tosser. We needed a bass player so we nicked theirs, Darryl. He enjoyed playing our stuff more than theirs. In fact, we nicked the whole band, bass, guitar and drummer - oh, and the piano player, Nigel. We did a gig at Kendal as Moonlight Drive & The Brothel Creepers.

So what were your influences in those days?

R: Blues, Eric Clapton and stuff of the time like Neil Young and Poco... Arthur Lee & Love... Apple Tree Theatre and Mu and all that psychedelic stuff, although I never thought of it as psychedelic.

Harry?

H: Bob Dylan and the Beatles. And a bit of Beefheart - we used to do a Beefheart number or two. The very first band I was in was Junkyard Angel back in Harrogate, we did covers of Free and Jethro Tull and Spooky Tooth and blues things - this was in 1968, '69, during the blues boom. Those first three Jethro Tull albums were quite jazzy in a way and I'd only learned three chords and had to start playing all this stuff... it was wild!

How did the Brothel Creepers get going properly?

H: This fucking idiot called Tony Sherwood spotted us for some reason, I don't know how that came about. He used to have this huge great chair with three cushions on it which he'd sit on - he was a dwarf basically. Anyway, this geezer spotted us playing art school dances and said OK, we'll book you as a rock & roll band and started putting us round the working men's clubs.

R: There was one famous gig we did, Tony said "I've got a gig lined up for you at Brampton Hospital". "Oh," we thought, "playing for all the patients. Should we go dressed up in bandages?" We thought we'd better not so we drove out to where we thought it was and stopped off at Ollerton Police Station to ask for directions. The guy there had never heard of "Brampton Hospital" but he said there is this place called Rampton Maximum Security Hospital, maybe we meant that? And it was.

Did you have to play inside a cage, or what?

H: It was weird, man, if you went to the toilet you had to have someone with you and no more than two could go in at the same time - and that applied to us!

R: They had all the hard cases at the back and all the nutters and criminally insane were at the front. We were allowed a twenty minute spot between a ventriloquist and a comedian/comper.

H: We got paid £28 for that. Anyway, we were with Sherwood and doing three sets a night between the bingo etc and we just got sick of it so we started throwing in a few reggae numbers, which went down like a lead balloon.

Was it a problem sticking to the same set every night?

H: Well yeah, we really wanted to get out of playing the same thing every night. The thing was we used to rehearse a lot, and we'd like to jam out as well.

How did that effect the Plummet Airlines days when you were a 'known' band, because people expect to hear certain songs?

H: We stuck to our sets pretty rigidly then and worked in new numbers. We always kept certain crowd pleasers in, like 'Dr. Boogie' and 'Silver Shirt', which was the first song I ever wrote. It was recorded and released as a Stiff Records single some years later.

So did this become the final line-up of Plummet Airlines, or were there changes along the way?

R: Yeah, we had a drummer called Simon Bladon originally. He was in the original Brothel Creepers and he freaked out, had some kind of woman trouble (as usual) so we got Keith in during 1974.

Duncan played his first gig with us at Gedling Miners Welfare Club with a home-made guitar - he'd took over from Ken, but that was before we changed our name to Glider, we were still the Brothel Creepers then.

H: What happened was, Darryl and Duncan said they could go down to London and get us a gig so they went and they drew a blank, so Richard and myself went and started at the Hope & Anchor. Fred Grainger there said, "I'll give you a gig if Matt at the Kensington does", so we

zoomed straight over and said look, Fred's giving us a gig so you give us a gig. And he said, "I'll take a fucking hammer to your head you fucking bastard", which was a phrase that stayed round the band for years afterwards...

But you got the gig!

H: Yeah, we got a residency at the Kensington and we got the Hope & Anchor gig at the same time. Dave Robinson was running the studio at the Hope & Anchor, Fred Grainger was the manager and John Eichler was running the bar and they gave us a gig there. The first time we played to six people, but the management liked it so they booked us again.

Meanwhile you changed your name again from Glider to Plummet Airlines...

H: That's right, what happened was we were playing the Kensington and went to the bar for a drink after the first set and these two blokes came up, said that they enjoyed it and that they were also in a band called Glyder. They gave me this letter from their solicitors which said, "If you continue to use the name..." etc, etc. I just laughed, but we had to change our name. They were crap too, played on kiddies' TV shows...

R: That first gig at the Hope was fucking great, there were six people and the barmaids from upstairs paid to come down to watch. Was it that one when this figure came out of the shadows when we were doing a soundcheck?

H: No, that was later - this figure appeared with a joint and said "smoke this..." in a very quiet voice - and that was the first time we met Malcolm Morley, he was living at the Hope at the time 'cos he was a big mate of John Eichler. Anyway, the second gig at the Hope eleven people showed up, third gig 200 hundred turned up and the fourth gig broke the house record for the number of people in. Word got about really quickly, and that was all within six weeks. It was then that Fred and John offered to manage us, and being a bunch of fucking idiots we agreed.



(Malcolm Morley)

Weren't you at one time with the same people who managed the Strangers?

H: No, we were on an agency with them run by Derek Savage and Dai Davies called Albion who got us work. They offered to manage us later on and we were fools to turn it down. Dave Greenfield of the Strangers advised us against it but it was a mistake to listen to him, we should have gone with them. The thing was, as soon as Fred and John started to manage us we started to live at the Hope - it's a huge pub and we used to work behind the bar on our nights off to earn our keep.

Was any of the live material on the Plummet LP recorded at the Hope?

R: Yes it was, although only on cassette. We did do a 16-track recording but it didn't work out very well... it was all set up in the dressing room next to the stage and they recorded us on a Friday and Saturday night. The first night we played really well and they were just pissing about getting

the levels right and then the next night we didn't play so well...

Was working with Malcolm Morley a successful collaboration?

H: He was a very laid-back, quiet guy. We knew he'd been in Man and Help Yourself, but to us he was just this shadowy figure who appeared. He started jamming with us in rehearsals and he was a good guitar player, had a good voice and could play piano well. And he wrote good songs. He would rehearse our stuff and his with us. Then we got a Dutch tour in 1976 and he came with us.

R: One thing I remember about Malcolm's involvement with the band was that he made us more laid-back - or sophisticated. We probably had a lot more bite before he joined us but he made us much more musical.

How did the Dutch tour go?

R: Rotterdam was a brilliant gig, people were still going nuts after a two-hour set.

H: At the last gig we backed Clancey who were a 6-piece band, kind of a pub rock and country band but also a bit funky. Ernie Graham out of Eire Apparent was in the band, and Brinsley Forde who later formed Aswad, and a brilliant percussionist called Caspar Lowell. He later turned up at one of our Sunday night gigs at the Marquee and said "Hey man, I've come to play with you..."

Was this for a couple of numbers of for the whole set?

H: No, he did the whole set - and quite a few gigs afterwards. He also recorded one of the John Peel sessions with us. Malcolm Morley had left the band after we got back from Holland, he didn't want to do it any more. This recording session at Foel Studios had been set up, basically to do Malcolm's solo stuff. We backed him for those sessions. The first takes were all the best but as usually happens it was all done again and the enthusiasm just disappeared. He tried to do them again, at Rockfield I think, but anyway the songs never saw the light of day.



At this point the Plummetts were at the peak of their careers, you did a couple of Peel sessions and supported some interesting bands such as Van Der Graaf Generator, Huey Lewis and Mallard...

H: Yeah, that was so sad because we were big Beefheart

fans and of course Mallard were the Magic Band without Beefheart. They had this guy called Sam Galpin who sang a bit like Beefheart, but doing something different didn't really work. Musically they were amazing, but the crowd wanted Beefheart and didn't get him so they weren't allowed to breath and go for it. A shame really.

R: We were getting some good support gigs, we supported Dave Edmunds' Rockpile at the London School of Economics with Ultravox bottom of the bill, but then things started going downhill for us when we couldn't get a record deal.

What, was nobody interested?

H: No, apparently EMI Harvest offered us £15,000 for a one album deal but Fred turned it down because he'd heard this band called Kokomo had got a £100,000 deal and was obsessed with the idea of getting the same for us.

R: There were all these other bands on the circuit, punk rock still hadn't quite happened and Fred was into holding out for a bigger deal than anyone else. Things between Fred and John were bad, money was disappearing and it was getting to be a bad atmosphere.

H: So what happened was we had a band meeting and decided we'd got to get rid of 'em, because we were going nowhere and decided that we'd be better off on our own. It was horrible, because I really liked the guys. We just wanted to work, get a record deal and release an album.

An album eventually came out on Armageddon Records, why did that take so long to appear?

R: I put that together after the band split up, I thought it was a shame that there were all these recordings lying around - like live stuff, and John Peel sessions recorded on a hand-held cassette recorder - and that we'd never got an album out, which was what we'd always wanted. Initially it was the guys at Nuggets who heard I was thinking of doing it and they said the money was going to be up front, so I got the stuff together and they backed out. In the meantime I'd joined a band called the Brainiac 5 down in Cornwall and I got a call from Armageddon Records who I think we (the Brainiacs) were doing some business with, and the album came out in 1981. I think the material was pretty representative of our live set, although it could have been better - we could have recorded better gigs.

Did it sell many copies?

R: Two or three thousand were pressed and at one time we tried to find out if we'd been ripped off and we hadn't - Keith rang up pretending to be a Dutch fan who wanted to buy a load and was told there were 500 left and that was all.

Why did the band split up?

H: We'd decided to use this guy called Ricky Offler who seemed to be getting gigs for loads of bands, he was booking for all the student unions. He was a speed freak though, a complete tosser and Richard got so sick of it that he left. Then the whole punk rock thing happened and Ricky said that Darryl the bass player was better looking than me so he should sing and I should play bass - we had a three day rehearsal and I learned all the bass parts but he couldn't learn the singing. So we switched back, and then my guitar got stolen in Streatham and when Ricky said "Punk

singers don't play guitar" I thought fuck you.... the last gig I played was in Southampton supporting the Yachts.

And post-Plummets you did at least one single as Harry & The Atoms...

H: We'd better not talk about that...

And the rest of the band?

R: I joined Brainiac 5 as I've said, and subsequently Audio Murphy. Duncan and Keith joined the Darts - and Duncan was in Audio Murphy as well.

H: And Darryl plays bass in the Pogues.

Plummet Airlines were interviewed by Mark Murden. Written and produced by Phil McMullen, © Ptolemaic Terrascope May 1993.