

Wilkie talks to Procol Harum's Reid, Ball

This dual interview marks Lawrence Wilkie's first interview in what will, with luck become a regular feature on THE GATEWAY Arts Pages.

This interview is in two parts, the first with the lead guitarist for Procol, Dave Ball; and the second with Procol's lyricist and guiding influence, Kieth Reid.

Dave Ball

Lawrence Wilkie: I understand you used to play for Herman Hermits.

Dave Ball: Where did that leak?! Actually I did some sessions drumming for Peter Moore after the Hermits had officially disbanded. I have been playing the guitar for 10 years but I switched to drums in order to help Peter out during those few sessions and a few TV shows. I did tape drumming lessons when I had visions of being in a great dance band.

L. Wilkie: Were you in any other bands before Procol Harum?

D. Ball: Until about last Christmas I was with a group called "Big Bertha". We recorded some things which were never released and other than that we

just fooled around. That lasted for about a year. I also kicked around doing session work like Peter Noone's thing which is all pretty boring.

L. Wilkie: When did you first find out about the vacancy in Procol Harum?

D. Ball: I read it in the ad section of "Melody Maker." I really dug Procol Harum's music so I thought I'd go down and give it a try. I was told I didn't have much of a chance to audition since Procol Harum was advertising for some weeks and there were about 70 guitarists before me. I chatted it up with the secretary, though, and she got me in the schedule. It was alright after that.

L. Wilkie: Did you think it would be difficult to replace Robin Trower?

D. Ball: No. I never was really afraid of him musically. He's a great guitarist but I don't think it was any great task to replace him. In L.A. last August a girl came up to me to sign a giant poster of Robin. I told her it didn't look anything like me but she said "That's all right Robin, sign it anyway."

L. Wilkie: What type of guitarist were Procol Harum looking for?

D. Ball: They were looking for a guitarist who was prepared to

play what the band wanted him to do. I'm completely content to do this but Robin was developing a very particular style which he was unable to develop within the confines of the group so he left to form his own band.

L. Wilkie: Who are your main influences musically?

D. Ball: Its mainly the blues, particularly Otis Rush and Buddy Guy.

L. Wilkie: Do you think you'd be content to play with Procol Harum indefinitely?

D. Ball: This is very difficult to say. At the moment - yes. I've always got to be doing what I want to do, though, and in the future I might not be able to do it while playing for Procol Harum at the same time.

L. Wilkie: Would you ever want to form your own group?

D. Ball: I seem to have a certain contradiction about that question within myself. I like to get my own way a lot but I don't like the hassles of leaving a group if it comes to blows. You'll find that most people who leave one group to form another don't really succeed. Anyway - I don't want it to look like I'm thinking of leaving Procol Harum because this certainly is not true.

L. Wilkie: Was it difficult to first fit into Procol Harum?

D. Ball: When Alan Cartwright joined there was no difficulty there since he had already known the group. When I joined, though, it was the first time I had met any of Procol Harum. For awhile everybody had their party faces on but after our first argument we were still friends and that's what it's all about.

L. Wilkie: Have you written anything for Procol Harum yet?

D. Ball: No. At the moment I'm just happy to play Gary's music. I've written a few things in the past but they've been pretty sub-standard. If I were to write anything it would be just myself since the songs would be personal and only meaningful to me.

L. Wilkie: They'd be along the blues vein, I take it? *Definitely. That's why it would be apart from Procol Harum. I'm talking about a solo album situation and it would mainly be working with blues artists.*

Kieth Reid

L. Wilkie: Is Procol Harum Latin or the name of a cat?

K. Reid: When Gary and I were first forming the group we were thinking of a name and "Procol Harum" cropped up. This was the name of a pedigree cat which belonged to a close friend of ours. The Latin controversy which was in "Rolling Stone" awhile back is all wrong. When we first chose the name we were not aiming at any significance beyond just using the name. The name's never seemed to be accepted since people can't seem to identify with it.

L. Wilkie: Why wasn't the first LP stereo?

K. Reid: At that time we had a record producer named Denny Cordell who since then has received a certain amount of importance in the record industry. Then, though, he was unaware of recording and recording studios.

L. Wilkie: Wasn't there anyone else?

K. Reid: It wasn't the point of there being anyone else but that we didn't have a choice. We needed a producer and he happened to be the one.

L. Wilkie: Why the switch from Deram Records to A & M?

K. Reid: It was nothing to do with us. We were contracted to an independent production company and they leased our services to A & M.

L. Wilkie: Why was the first album so late in coming after "White Shade of Pale"?

K. Reid: It was through the fault of the record company and/or the producer. We had the first LP finished while "White Shade" was still in the charts. The same happened with "Shine On Brightly." We had that finished 6 months before it was released.

L. Wilkie: Was "White Shade" written at about the same time as the other cuts on the first LP?

K. Reid: Yes. Gary and I wrote all the songs on the 1st LP at about the same time. We were performing them all on stage long before "White Shade" was released.

L. Wilkie: Have you ever been on stage before this concert in Edmonton?

K. Reid: Just once before when we did the concert in Stratford.

L. Wilkie: How did that come off?

K. Reid: Very well. It was a very fine orchestra and conductor.

L. Wilkie: How did it compare with the one here?

K. Reid: Better I think. Of course we only did 2 numbers in Stratford - "Salty Dog" and "In Held Twas In I" - a total of about 23 minutes. Here we had a whole show to do but only 4 hours in which to rehearse it. We haven't heard the tapes yet so I can't really tell how well this one went. If the tapes sound good this is definitely our next LP. As soon as it can be mixed we'll release it.

L. Wilkie: Has Procol Harem ever had an inclination to produce?

K. Reid: No. The closest we ever came was when Mathew Fisher produced "Salty Dog." But then again that wasn't us, that was just Matthew. In my mind probably the only group that was good at producing themselves were the Beatles. Even then they were helped. I just don't think it's possible for

anyone to be creative in the studio and the box at the same time. The best thing you can do is what we do - get a producer, in our case Chris Thomas - who is really sympathetic to your cause and let him convey your music to the tape. Basically the way we end up sounding is the way we would want to sound if we were to do it ourselves.

L. Wilkie: Have you got anything else in the can besides this Edmonton LP?

K. Reid: No, but we're going into the studio in January to record a new album. At the moment we've written about half of it.

L. Wilkie: Why has Procol Harem been through so many member changes?

K. Reid: It was mainly a force of circumstances. Matthew Fisher wanted to leave the group but didn't want to - if you know what I mean. We told him that if the group wasn't his first concern he should depart and he did. After Matthew left we felt we needed a stronger bass so David Knight, our bassist, left. Then Robin left simply because he wanted to form his own group. Basically people left because they weren't totally involved with the group and I can't really feel bad about that. We can only succeed, artistically and commercially, if everyone in the group is completely dedicated to Procol Harum.

L. Wilkie: When you write all your lyrics do you go through certain phases - say from the macabre to flowers?

K. Reid: Definitely. I always go through certain phases but never to the point of pretty thing such as flowers. As a matter of fact I've written more this autumn than ever before.

L. Wilkie: How do you account for that?

K. Reid: I'm a Libran.

L. Wilkie: Do you deeply believe in astrology?

K. Reid: I believe in it but not deeply. I think there's a lot of truth in it since to me it's a fact of life.

L. Wilkie: My favorite thing that you've written is "Dead Man's Dream" (a man dreams he is being pulled into a grave when he awakes and realizes that he actually is). You've always been writing this type of thing it seems. Have you always been infatuated with the supernatural?

K. Reid: I'm not infatuated with the supernatural - I'm infatuated with realism.

NO MORE

Ladies and Gentlemen, Your Friendly Arts Editor is not an unkind man. In fact is almost likeable in a sort of malignant way.

But he has a lot to cope with: copy deadlines, stoned writers, illiterate writers, cheezed-off writers, euphoric writers, writers trying to achieve Bahkti, or however you spell it, etc. So you can see, his life is not an easy one.

And it is not made any easier by hordes of freelancing rock interviewers who need a place to publish the fruits of their

labours. Do you realize that he was approached by no less than five different people who had interviews with Procol Harum in one form or another? Five!

Therefore know ye all who would interview, the Gateway Arts Pages will not run any interview unless it is cleared before hand with the arts editor. None. No exceptions.

Now maybe I can get back to artsy pictures and bizarre rock show promos.

Sincerely,
Your Friendly Arts Editor

Margaret read



photo by Ray Dallin

I wouldn't want to say that "the best wine was saved for the last", but Margaret Atwood read to a capacity crowd at noon Friday in the SUB art gallery, ending a series of readings sponsored by Grant MacEwan Community College and the Canada Council, the Department of English of this university, and the League of Canadian Poets which has brought a large number of Canada's best poets to this city during the past four months.

Miss Atwood read primarily from her most recent collection, *Power Politics*, although for the benefit of many students in the audience who are reading from *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* as part of their class work she included a number of poems from

this earlier collection. Following the reading she fielded questions from the audience on subjects ranging from politics to women's liberation to "have you a memory?" ("Yes, but not as far as my own poems are concerned. If I go back to a poem I wrote a year ago, I have trouble recognizing it as my own"). Among the poets who have read their work in the city recently were Alfred Purdy, Dorothy Livesay, F.R. Scott, bp nichol, George Bowering, Stephen Scobie, Earle Birney, and bill bissett.

Sid Stephen