

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY.....

1.

I left The Fall on April 20th, 1979. I know because there was an Iggy Pop gig at The Factory, in Hulme the same night, and I had managed to get myself the job of on-stage security . . . me and my friend Eric McGann. That was the night I told Mark I was leaving. Eric had already left The Fall, he was only in a short time, but he was still a good friend of mine.

Mark was mortified. He thought it was a terrible thing and tried to convince me of my folly. He was unprepared for it, obviously. He knew we were a strong band, and I was an innovative guitarist, so he was quite upset.

It was an ongoing thing of Mark, him just pushing his weight around and treating the band members like crap. Everyone else left for the same basic reasons . . . that Mark wanted it his way. I did understand that to a point because he had an idea, this concept of what The Fall was going to be, or what it could be. But it was only a vehicle therefore, for him, obviously. His legacy, his fame into perpetuity or whatever!

It was an interesting thing he wanted to lay on people, but he was going about it in a selfish way.

I took Una to hospital one day and missed practice because of that. Kay came round and was screaming and shouting at Una for leading me astray and that was the last straw. I left because I was sick of us being treated like children.

Mark said to me that night, you know Una is not who you think she is, why leave the band? This is your future, you know it. Probably he had a point! But I left anyway.

We had recorded Live At The Witch Trials the previous December. I had wanted to record the latest material, which was more Fall-like and original, less punky, less mainstream. We were getting into our stride. I wanted to do songs like "Put Away" . . . a lot of stuff that ended up on Dragnet. Remembering the songs now is difficult now, because they changed names and reworked some of them in the next line-up of the band, but we had "Before The Moon Falls" and "Psychic Dancehall" and others. So the story of Dragnet is less straightforward than it seems.

Our live set was changing all the time, but Mark had a strong sense of chronology, and he wanted to record the first songs on the first album, but I thought some of them were too "punky."

"Psychic Dancehall" was a story I told Mark about a club I used to go to - a little disco - above a spiritualist church in Prestwich, called Questors Psychic Disco. It was a rough little dive, a pre-18 place, because there was no alcohol. It got raided by the police one night. I didn't know Mark at that point, and Mark never went, but later I told him about this place, and the "outside" of Prestwich became a strong theme in his writing. I wrote the music originally, but it changed by the time of Dragnet. I taught Craig Scanlon the songs when he took my place . . . I taught songs to Marc Riley when he joined, as well. They reworked some of them in their style, but I taught them the originals. My writing was quirky, and they simplified the a bit, but . . .

2.

Quite often I had musical ideas, sitting in my room with a mono cassette recorder, working on bits of music. Mark would have some words, come in with sheets of paper. I enjoyed crafting a song around that, like pushing pieces of a jigsaw puzzle together. I usually already had the music before I saw the words, and from various bits of riffs and pieces I had, I would choose bits that could fit the words, but sometimes I'd come up with something completely new. Usually there was some sort of synchronicity about it . . . the right thing would be there in the arsenal of ideas to use at some point. If a line was repeated, there would be a chorus there or a break there, and if Mark sang that, I could do the middle bit there. I often had some riffs I was keen to do something with, but would have to wait for the right words.

"A Figure Walks" I wrote, and we played it live. I wrote every note and taught it to the band. Craig replaced me, but he came round my flat and I taught him the songs so I wouldn't leave them in the lurch. The way it was told in the Fall camp I left them in the middle of a tour . . . but I wasn't aware there was a tour! That's how much in the dark they were keeping me, as if there were no need for me to know they were playing a tour or anything! To me, we just had an ongoing series of gigs. We went on just one tour, the Here And Now tour. But you have to leave at some point, so I left. I did my best to find the replacement and bring them up to speed.

The boys who were on Dragnet, they were school chums and avid Fall fans, and they used to follow us around everywhere and roadie for us. Craig Scanlan, Steve Hanley and Marc Riley. They had a band when we met them, Staff 9. So they were musical pals. When I left, Craig came up to guitar and Steve to bass, and Marc moved to guitar, he was the bass player before I left. Marc was already in the band, so he knew the basic songs already and could switch to guitar, but Craig was the one who needed to learn the parts from scratch.

They rewrote the guitar parts based on what I wrote, because there were two guitarists instead of one. As they developed parts, the songs changed in the process. The new bass player, Steve, would have been taught by Marc. The songs evolved, but "A Figure Walks" is pretty much the same as what I wrote.

"Printhead" is one of mine. It had two titles before Mark settled on that one. I can't remember them, but they were lines from the song. The credits used to say "arranged by The Fall and Martin Bramah." Mark didn't know an arranger from a writer. I was credited with arranging all the songs from Witch Trials, but that's apparently been erased from recent copies! Mark isn't a musician and he doesn't ask for opinions. He'd have paper in front of him and would decide who had written it when people weren't there, just filling forms in.

One song I was really proud of was "Various Times." I sat in my room and wrote all the parts and taught them to the band. But when Mark filled in the forms, he credited that to everyone, a group effort, which really annoyed me. The band all knew I had written it, but their opinion was not welcomed.

"Dice Man" was not one of mine, I was gone by then. Aside from material I wrote, the other source of songs that made up Dragnet was the Staff 9 catalog of songs. They had a whole set and supported The Fall a few times in the early days. They brought that set with them and Mark cherry-picked what he liked. So Staff 9 songs and mine, sometimes reworked, though I got no credit for anything as Mark was pissed off with me. He had the power and no one would call that into question.

"Before The Moon Falls," again, was one of mine, but the music was stripped down. The original tune became "Work" for The Blue Orchids. In different hands, the same music can become quite different songs. If I sing to the melody of "Work," I can put the lyrics to "Before The Moon Falls" over it. Mark kind of just threw the words over the end of each melodic line, whereas in "Work," the words go over the music. And with The Fall, the guitar line became kind of a bass line - in "Work," the bass was something else. I had written the music, but on "Moon" they went on a musical journey and came up with something rather different.

"Your Heart" was an early song for The Fall which didn't get on Witch Trials. We jammed it out in the early days when we were kind of primitive, a bass line, and I played one chord. It's a Tony Friel song, a medium-paced tune. Not exciting to play. Since Mark wanted to put the earliest songs on Witch Trials, you'd think it would be on there. There was an even earlier batch of songs that had fallen by the wayside. "Race Hatred" and "Hey Student!" And "Sten Gun Rock," like the German machine gun. "Sten gun rock, did it cock?" Ha ha ha. Mark was a little Nazi and he couldn't hide it, but that was the main refrain, a bit of nonsense. We played it in our shows. I remember we supported The Buzzcocks in London, the second gig we did, and we were playing "Sten Gun" then, it was quite like a Clash song. It didn't stay in the set long, because we didn't like that stuff. "Race Hatred," we ripped off the "Sister Ray" rhythm riff thing for that, it was a big long jam on two chords. "Hey Student!" became "Hey Fascist!" and back to being "Hey Student!" when they recorded it, but it was "Hey Marc Riley!" in there too. It became "Hey Fascist!" because of the Rock Against Racism movement.

"Muzorewis Daughter" is not one of mine, neither is "Flat Of Angles." To hazard a guess of where they came from, I'd say Staff 9. Mark took his pick of Staff 9 songs, rewrote some of the words, wrote new lyrics for others. He left behind the singer of that band, taking all the songs bit by bit, nicking them effectively. Obviously, the singer is lost to history, but I imagine he is quite bitter when he hears the lost Staff 9 songs! It was a way of keeping the ball rolling for Mark, he just took what was at hand to get the album out, and quick!

Mike Leigh answered an advert when Karl left. This teddy boy turned up from Rockin Ricky and the Velvet Collars, I think it was. He had a full teddy boy outfit. Mark liked that. The fact that he wasn't a very good drummer didn't matter, because Mark wanted a simple beat with just a snare, which is fine. Mike wasn't that tight, it was a bit of a backwards step, because Karl had been such a good drummer, but . . .

"Choc-Stoc" was a song I originally wrote, but that was one that really changed a lot and is related to "Pop Stickers" - with some big Staff 9 musical contribution in there. I was going through an esoteric phase, writing-wise, putting together strange ideas and arrangements and they were not that catchy, so they changed that quite a lot. "Weak Tea" or "I Like Weak Tea" it was called at some point. We had been playing it live when I was in the band.

"Spectre Vs Rector," "Fiery Jack" and "Second Dark Age" are not mine. "Put Away" was a song I wrote the music for. Its a one-chord kind of thing, like early Elvis in my mind.

I was credited for "Mess Of My," but Eric McGann wrote the music - the main riff for that. I had no hand in that, but Mark credited me, not asking anyone. It was a nice original guitar line, but he wouldnt credit Eric, because he was already gone. Mark had a mindset that anyone not in the band would not get a writing credit "posthumously." Why waste the money? Thats his frugal approach.

"Rowche Rumble" and "In My Area," those were mine, but the boys jammed them out and rearranged them from songs I wrote when we were playing.

It upset me, not getting credit for things Id written, but I was used to it with Mark. You had to put it aside because otherwise, its a strange one. He has a way of working people thats hard to explain. Its that thing of wanting to impress your abuser. You have to get into psychology, like that girl, Patty Hearst, joining that gang, and the Stockholm Syndrome.

In the first years after I left The Fall, I had little interaction with Mark. A bit, because we lived in the same village. Idvsee him in pubs. Sometimes wed have a drink, depending, sometimes we were friends, sometimes not.

He hated The Blue Orchids. I think the only gig The Fall ever blew out last minute was one where - we had the same agents - they were supposed to be the support band when we were playing with Nico. I think he agreed to it when he knew he was supporting Nico, but at that point The Blue Orchids had become her backing band, so The Fall never turned up, because they were not going to support us. We had all been fans when we were teenagers, but he was pissed off that WE were working with her! It was like that.

So HERE IT IS... A DIM VIEW ON THE PAST -
VIA A SKYPE INTERVIEW I DID WITH OUR MAN
IN BUDAPEST. TYPED UP ON AN OLD HUNGARIAN
TYPEWRITER. A BIT GARBLED AND BIASED I KNOW.
ENJOY!
Martin Bramel