

JETHRO TULL BIOGRAPHY

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In the latter months of 1967, four shaggy wannabe's congregated in the Southern UK town of Luton, Bedfordshire. From the debris of the disillusioned and disintegrated John Evan Band and McGregor's Engine, the naïve, untutored talents of Ian Anderson, Mick Abrahams, Glenn Cornick and Clive Bunker tentatively coalesced to form the original Jethro Tull line-up.

After fulfilling a few remaining dates under the John Evan banner, the group established themselves as Jethro Tull, new resident band at London's famous Marquee club, albeit after a few false start identities ("Navy Blue", "Ian Henderson's Bag 'o Blues", Jethro Toe" and the certainly suicidal "Candy Coloured Rain").

By March 1968, they had built a following as the new face of the blues-based British underground music scene. Lines stretched around the block on a Thursday night when they performed at the Marquee. Ian Anderson would typically join the line as if to buy a ticket himself wearing the shabby hand-me-down overcoat which was to become his trademark for the next few years. Often, he would be seen with a Woolworth's carrier bag containing flute, harmonicas, alarm clock and hot water bottle, in strange precursor role of the Aqualung/tramp persona.

John Peel and Brian Mathews (BBC Radio) and John Gee (The Marquee Club) were influential in championing the cause of the band in these early months.

Following appearances in Hyde Park and at the Sunbury Jazz and Blues Festival in the summer of '68, the band gained wider public recognition with the release of their first album "This Was" which, whilst paying homage to the blues heritage which they all revered, hinted at the broader influences which were to become apparent in the post-Mick Abrahams times to follow.

After the personal and musical differences which marked the then acrimonious separation, Mick Abrahams left to form the briefly successful "Blodwyn Pig". The remaining Tull boys embarked, with the then unproven addition of replacement Martin Barre, on the recording of the landmark album "Stand Up" at the beginning of 1969.

Without the support of John Peel and others, the group struggled to regain the approval of both public and media alike.

Happily, the new record, "Stand Up" proved to be a great success, and lead the way to new opportunities in Europe and the USA. Ian Anderson's music writing came of age with this album and the influences of classical, jazz, folk and ethnic music forms made the eclectic result an early landmark for the band.

After achieving the Number One position in the UK album charts, Tull, initially in the shadow of Led Zeppelin and others, began the explosive ascent to the lofty heights of US stardom, culminating during the next three years in the cover stories of Time and Rolling Stone magazines, five nights at the Forum in Los Angeles and three nights at Madison Square Gardens, New York.

A few hit singles livened up the band's career, amongst them, "Living in the Past", written during the first US tour early in 1969, to keep warm the reputation back home in the UK.

However, it was the albums as a whole which provided the strength for the developing Jethro Tull, containing as they did, not one, but usually several classic rock radio-friendly tracks to keep the band's profile high between concert tours and new releases.

"Benefit", "Aqualung", and the so-called concept albums "Thick as a Brick" and "A Passion Play" confirmed the progressive rock tag which complemented other terms like "Art-rock", "Blues-rock", "Folk-rock", and "Hard-rock", depending on the critics' personal views of the often-complex musical thought trains of flautist and singer, Ian Anderson.

Jeffrey Hammond-Hammond replaced Cornick on Bass, Barriemore Barlow took over the drum chair from Bunker, and the addition of old school chum John Evan on piano made easier the transition from the blues band of '68 to the band of the mid-seventies who sounded like.....well, just sounded like Jethro Tull.

The first rock act since the Beatles to perform at Shea Stadium, New York, Tull laid claim to the live concert throne in North America. Howard Stern studiously learned the lyrics to "Aqualung". Elton John set about regaining the title of most-people-played-to in major US cities. Bill Clinton wisely chose saxophone over the flute.

Not without its share of critical abuse, Tull pushed on with difficult and sometimes controversial themes, often falling into a knowing self-parody and employing humour to "lighten up" the occasionally bombastic and overly serious subject matter.

With two number one albums in the USA and other world-wide chart and sales success behind them, the band began to remove itself from the more commercially-driven side of recording and touring. Through the latter 70's and into the 80's, they produced several records and tours which, although not replicating their earlier numerical successes, proved throughout the world the enduring artistic credibility of a band continually able to reinvent itself.

"Warchild", "Too Old to Rock and Roll: Too Young to Die", "Minstrel in the Gallery", "Songs from the Wood", and "Heavy Horses" saw the popularity of the band extend into parts of the world where rock music had not hitherto been encouraged and the Tull legend from Buenos Aires to Budapest took root, eventually to be rewarded by the many tours in places where other acts feared, or simply did not care, to tread.

At various times, David Palmer, John Glascock, Dave Pegg, drummer Doane Perry, and more recently, current members Andrew Giddings on keyboards and bassist Jonathan Noyce have brought their unique and valuable contributions to the line-up to join the ever-ready mainstay guitarist Martin Barre who, like Anderson himself, provided the continuity and legacy of the earlier years.

The loyalty of the long-standing fans and the ongoing enlistment of new converts were to ensure the survival of Tull into the eighties and nineties with "Crest of a Knave" ('87) and "Roots to Branches" ('95) being highlights of those decades, together with the Ian Anderson solo flute album "Divinities" providing the first Billboard Magazine number one chart record since 1973.

With 60 million albums sold and over 2500 concerts played in 40 countries, the band continue to record and perform, typically 100 shows to around 300,000 people each year throughout all the major rock and roll territories of the world.

Tull still draw the crowds across the US and all of Europe, frequently out-performing the current darlings of the pop world, increasingly so as the true worth of the cream of the last three decades of rock music is grasped by younger generations as well as the contemporaries of the band themselves.

Just as the record sales and reputations of the Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin enjoy the ongoing rich fruits of fan-base loyalty, Tull continue to pursue, alive and kicking, the goals of musical development into the new millennium, without the constriction of management and record company-induced commercial considerations.

In early 2002, Jethro Tull completed their first DVD of live concert and performance material. Also released is the new associated live CD. Both are entitled, "LIVING WITH THE PAST".

In 2003, Ian A. released his fourth solo album, RUPIS DANCE, Martin Barre launched his guitar towards STAGE LEFT and Tull did the almost unthinkable: THE JETHRO TULL CHRISTMAS ALBUM was released to celebrate the "other" Christmas. With its fair quotient of "cynicism and grumpiness" as Ian puts it, this record will delight old fans and new fans alike with the alternative and conventional Christmas spirit combined.

Re-masters of the entire Tull catalogue are being released, dusted down and spruced up. Hear that tambourine again.... the breath behind the flute.... the pick on string and the stick on skin.

Still, what do they know? Well, go tell them.....

Rodney Quill,
January 2004.