

ON THE LEVEL

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PHOTOGRAPH - JARED PEPALL

FEATURING: **SWEET** PLUS
WOOLLY WOLSTENHOLME NOT TO
MENTION **URIAH HEEP** AND MORE.....

'NUMBER 1 FOR ROCK'

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In July 1979, after twelve years with the same band, Woolly Wolstenholme left Barclay James Harvest at a time when the band's future looked brighter than ever before. In his own words, "It was a serious problem for me that, as the band became more and more successful, the long overdue solo projects were becoming less and less feasible as group work demanded an ever increasing share of the time. The band had, in my eyes, become more important than its members."

QUOTE FROM
PRESS HANDOUT

We had been talking for at least fifteen minutes about Woolly's reasons for leaving Barclay James Harvest when I just happened to fiddle with the monitor switch on my tape recorder. To my horror I found I was recording the Sunday Morning show on Capital Radio rather than our conversation.

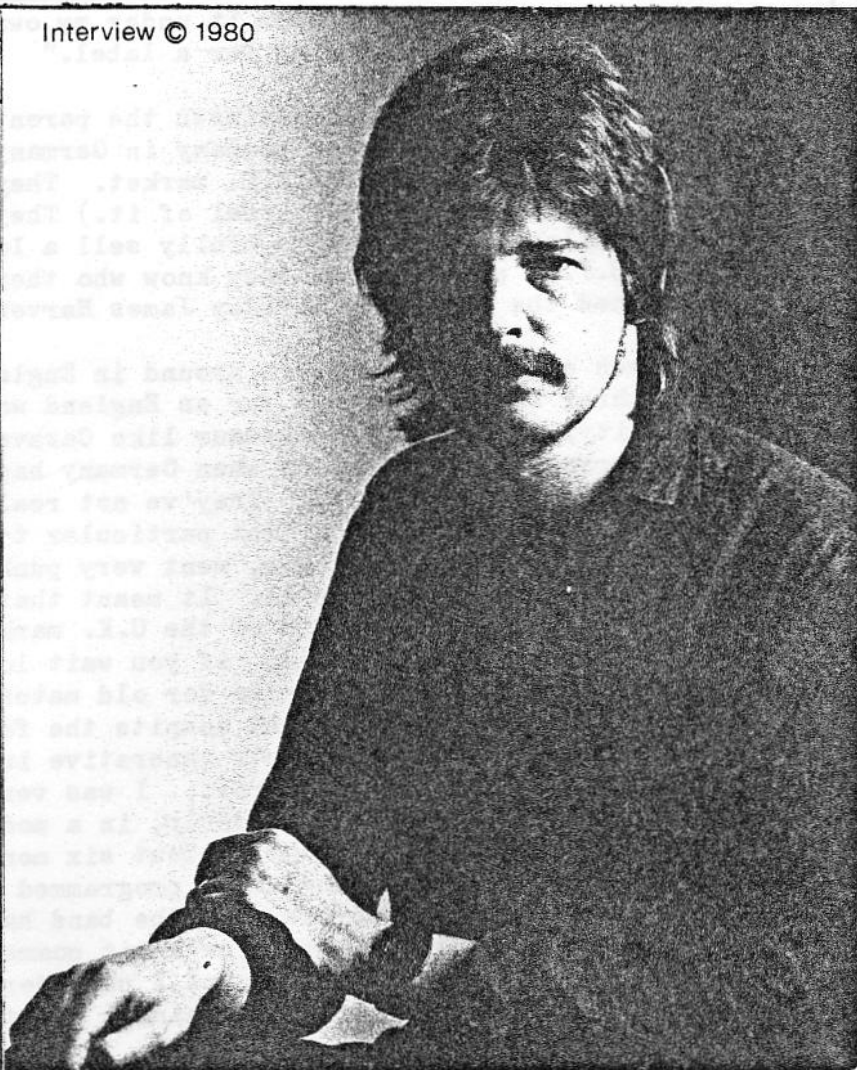
Having explained the minor technical setback, much to Woolly's amusement, the interview continued.

What did you think of the first B.J.H. album without you, 'EYES OF THE UNIVERSE' I asked?

"I can't really knock it on any commercial grounds because, obviously in Germany it is a platinum album - it's half a million records. I'm expecting my album to do proportionally less. I'm not anticipating it being in a competitive element with them, or even being a quarter of what they'll sell. I'll be happy, especially in today's climate with 50,000 as apposed to 500,000 and I'll be amazed at that!

"Music, like everything else, is going through a very uneasy period so the time I left B.J.H. was the worst time in the world to do it because I had a really difficult time trying to get a deal together, trying to get

Interview © 1980



WOOLLY WOLSTENHOLME

NO LONGER THE INVISIBLE MAN

INTERVIEW BY DEREK LIDDARD

the album out. I'd already made it under my own steam so I was considerably down in pocket and looking for a label."

Are you still with Polydor?

"Yes I am now, but I've signed with the parent company. I've signed with Deutsche Gram. the parent company in Germany. They had the success with the band that eluded the U.K. market. They had the funds, ('though I've not actually seen a great deal of it.) They had the money and the scheme to follow through and hopefully sell a lot of my albums, not just on the ex-B.J.H. platform but they know who they're selling to."

I mentioned the fact that Barclay James Harvest are really big in Germany.

"We'd been eight or nine years around in England before we even started to do anything in Germany. As far as England was concerned, the band was a dead entity, the standard dinosaur like Caravan, going around forever in ever decreasing circles. So when Germany happened, we were a new band as far as they were concerned. They've not really gone for the New Wave or whatever. They've avoided that particular type of music, they haven't accepted it. (Holland I believe, went very punk) but Germany have resisted it so far, they don't like it. It meant that there was a continuous market running. The dismal end of the U.K. market was then transferred to the German market, and hopefully, if you wait long enough, there will be another market open somewhere else for old material.

"I was also very concerned that despite the fact that a group is an Island, that is, it tends to be self generative internally, it does have a lot of influence from what's current. I was very aware that whatever was going in the pop field, would suddenly, in a modified way, arrive on one of the songs on an album - usually about six months afterwards. The fact that we were being subtly and maybe programmed by management and things to be aware of commercial trends... The band had survived quite naturally for nine years without being the least bit commercial and why it should all suddenly have changed now to what I consider is the disco influence... Whether it's a good thing or a bad thing I don't really want to say but I think it's unnecessary."

Which do you see as the definitive Barclay James Harvest album?

"I've got a soft spot for 'Once Again'. I don't know why but certainly it must have had, what I consider to be stand-out tracks on it. In fact none of them written by me are the stand-out tracks. 'Mocking Bird', naturally, 'Galadriel', 'She Said', which at that period, and only that period, were typical B.J.H. material. Certainly seeing that a lot of them survived in the stage act... 'Mocking Bird' unfortunately went on a little bit too long I think, but it was in the stage act until I left. So from 1972 to 1979, the same song was in the act for seven years, not really changing very much, whereas things like 'Medicine Man' got bent during the process and modified. I used to accept the fact that the crowds or audiences must have been at the shows to hear old material because the concert turnout was always disproportionate to the amount of records we sold. We might have been doing an 80,000 people tour, which I suppose nowadays is moderate, and sell twenty odd thousand records. It didn't seem to tie in very much. They were coming to the concerts for a different reason, not to be coerced into buying the new album or whatever!"

I always prefer to hear the album before going to a concert.

"I think that also gets you clued up as to what's going to be happening on the stage."

It's harder to remember songs when you hear them live for the first time.

"Well you have the power of recall with a record. You can just move it back a song and say, 'Oh, I'll hear that one again'. You can't do that with a live show 'cos once it's finished, it's finished, unless you get a live album."



I asked Woolly what he thought of the first live Barclay James Harvest album, one that has never been too high on my list.

"I think the material was alright. It was what we were doing at the time. The sound I thought was appalling but live albums are very subjective things. You have to be a member of the public to understand it because, honestly, I would never have heard the band with me in it from the audience' point of view because I was always on stage doing it. So it was never a personal, me and a band situation. I wouldn't have said, 'Yeah I remember, I was there at Liverpool Stadium, Hammersmith Odeon or whatever.' I was at the other side of the fence, so live albums, for me, have always been a weird thing. They always get thrown in as a stop gap item because they're cheap to make and with a relatively moderate act, you can pick up sales with just the fact that it's out - not because it's any good.

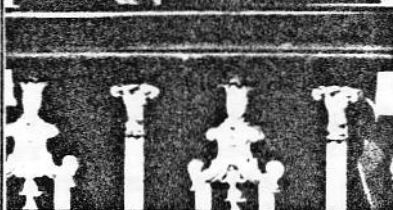
"You must have heard the thing about the Berlin concert that they did, (B.J.H.) the free one. They did it a couple of weeks back. There's a live album coming out from that. That's three live albums, whereas I think one would have been good enough. Also there's this unfortunate thing about live albums being left out.

They're instantaneous, they should be like a gig. It happens that night and that's it. They shouldn't be left out for years and years because they become so out of touch. With a studio album you can control it. You can say, 'Well this is the first time they've ever heard this song, and we'll spend time mixing it and put this effect on.' Hopefully, you'll get a product which is long lasting. It's got multiple facets. A live show tends to be just that night and maybe for a year afterwards and then another live show comes out which was modified or improved from that one. It's like the EMI syndromes of putting out thousands of samplers. There were four out at the same time in Germany, all with much the same tracks on. There's one out called 'Mockingbird' now, which has just got 'Mockingbird' on and I suppose another shuffling of the tracks that EMI have. They've had four, full price albums, and out of that they've got four compilations so they must be running out of formula soon."

Pye have done the same with Status Quo.

"Yeah, and Purple and things like that. Perhaps not quite as bad nowadays because at least you've got the things like K.Tel that have got a mix of various artists who get your singles out, but previously it was the norm. maybe after about a year or two, you'd made three





is more of a reality. 'Maestoso', it's the old one already believe it or not. There's maybe ten years of material on that. Not all of it from, like one every year but certainly a couple from quite early on. One's from maybe two or three years ago, there's a bunch from the last presentation 'cos I actually presented my songs for what would have been 'Eyes Of The Universe' before I left.

"There was rather a funny similarity between 'Lives On The Line' on my album and 'Love On A Line' on that album. Perculiar that!



out since then. Once you get the ball rolling, you end up with, presumab-

albums, two singles, then you get an album called 'Greatest Hits' that's got two hits on and the rest is just padding - 'B' sides and things."

I find them a bit annoying because you want to get every record put out by a particular band but end up having to draw the line at some point. You'd end up out of pocket in the end.

"That's right, you don't collect things for the music after a while. You collect it because it's a twelve by twelve cardboard thing with a black plastic disc in."

Getting back to 'Maestoso', I wondered how long it took to write and record the material used.

"This last six month's I've been writing for the new album, completely new with no archive material from me. The next album



"It took me over a three month period to make it which was about four weeks on, two weeks off, four weeks on, two weeks off, spread out quite a bit. It was done this year, March to May."

Do you find writing easy?

"Well, funny things happened of course. The weight of writing a full album had now been thrust on my shoulders where before I had other people, to a degree, to carry me. If I didn't want to write any songs I didn't have to because I knew that John would come up with so many and Les would. Now I've got to write. Like writing a novel, you have a few goes at it before you actually get the ball rolling in a process of things being created. Once I start to write it doesn't really stop until I say, 'That's it, I've finished it now.' For instance I've had three or four months of writing and I've said, 'Right, I'll have a rest now for two weeks or two months or something, just to refresh myself', and it's not stopped. There's been another couple of songs come

Photographs above - Barclay James Harvest as they are now - a three piece band. Top: John Lees (Guitarist), Middle: Mel Pritchard (Drummer) and Bottom: Les Holroyd (Bassist).

ly, plenty of information going in, which is really caused by you writing full stop, which then results with more coming out, which is a vicious circle. Once you get going, there's no reason why you can't go on forever."

Where do you draw your inspiration from?

"It's one of those things where I don't really know. The basic idea of the song - any sort of catalyst will do - a holiday, something on the box, something in the newspaper. If I read, I'd probably get a lot of stuff from books but I'm not really a great book freak, and innumerable relationships."

"Once you get all those things together then it starts off being one point of view and gradually works its way 'round through several others. For instance, 'Prospect Of Whitby' on the album is about being in Whitby, but the reason behind the song is some physical things that happened while I was there with my wife. Complicated things like that. So there's no true start to finish point - it's continuous."

Are you satisfied with the finished results of the album?

"I'm satisfied in as much that if I was too satisfied I wouldn't do another one. Besides that, there's a commercial interest to do more because, obviously, I need to eat."

Will you be doing a tour to promote the album?

"Not this one. I've still only got an embryonic band. I've only got a drummer and a guitarist. I need at least a bassist and possibly a second keyboard player because I'm going to be doing a lot of singing. Gone are the days when I used to be the invisible man behind the boxes at one side of the stage. You could hear me but you couldn't see me. I'll have to be more omnipresent nowadays."

"Obviously if I'm touring, it'll have to be an incredibly scaled down operation. I'm going to have to do it a lot cheaper than the band. I haven't really got access to that sort of money anymore. And certainly I want to redress the balance. I felt the stage show was getting a bit 'cosmic'. Too many props and not really a lot of talking to people, getting over this fact that 'you' are also human. The machine does it funnily enough. The machine tends to elevate, because as soon as you get the next particular set of lights, you need a front to set it off and then some curtains would be great, then you get passed the stage of the dry ice and smoke machines. Ultimately, when I do tour, I hope I've got a bit more grass roots, a bit more one to one rather than thousands of faces that you that you don't really communicate with apart from through speakers rather than through voice or through personality."

Recently Woolly has been writing soundtracks and themes for several television programmes. I wondered how on earth he got involved in doing those.

"Well, David Rohl who produced some of the band's albums, 'Octoberon', 'Gone To Earth' and the second live album, had an album out on his own called 'The Eye Of Wendor' which was 'Lord Of The Ringsesque'. It was going to be a set of three albums ultimately - people talking about legends and myths and kings. (Much too late it was. It really missed the boat. It should have been out in 1967, it would have really sold well.) The people who were doing the first thing that I was involved in, which was 'The Talking Parcel' which was a Gerald Durrell story, heard his record and said that music would be great for the type of thing we want in the background of this particular thing and so he got the job. Unfortunately, he didn't have enough material to sustain it over a forty minute show, so he asked me if I'd got anything. I had a few things I'd done at home on the revox which were suitable for this thing without being super, high quality and I wrote a few things especially for it and gradually it's just gone on from there."

"I did the Cinderella one which was last year's Christmas thing for this firm. It was forty minutes of constant music, which was a great challenge in a funny way. Usually you have to back someone speaking. It was like

making a non-singing album that was going to be on television. There was a lot of good experience in that. My outlook is a lot wider than the central core of rock music."

Have you ever had any other occupation other than that of a musician?

"Yes, I was a commercial artist. I went to artschool which was probably the greatest years of my life. Three years at Oldham artschool. It wasn't a great academic centre, it was just one stage up from a secondary modern school and I didn't really do anything for those three years. It really set the scene for me in the future - doing nothing for a living. Then I went to work in the arena of life. I actually got a job, but it was soul destroying compared to what I did at artschool, or what I didn't do at artschool. Artschool was a holiday really. Anyway, I did this for a couple of years, a commercial artist in it's truest sense and then the

opportunity came up to drop all that and go and live on the farm out in Dingel and be isolated from things, just bum around for another three or four years, so naturally I took it. Who wouldn't, who wouldn't?"

How about your music? Can you read music?

"I can't write music in it's normal sense. I'm not very good at the dots and I've not been programmed to come out with a routine way of learning, like you must learn about Bach and Beethoven. My music's very much an instant thing. I don't really know what's going on in music a lot of the time but I can grasp the way it sounds. My argument has always been that, if I can make one album, and via doing that, one person has written in and said they have liked it, for me, that is justification enough. Then somebody will say, 'What about the vinyl shortages and the energy crisis?' and I'll say, 'Well of course I can't argue with that, but at least I've reached one man.' Audiences are full of 'one men'. As soon as the audience becomes a consumer block, then that's it, you're ruined. I think people should be reached individually."

And what, finally, are your plans for the immediate future?

"Well, I've done another soundtrack for the 'Pied Piper', which will be on Boxing Day this year. I've also had some slight connection with another thing. I wrote the music but didn't actually play it. It was done by session men. It's called 'The Squad'. It's a

Thames Television thing for kids, four to five o'clock slot. It's coming out in Autumn.

"I'll spend my time at the moment preparing for the next album and the way things are going, I'm hoping to go into the studio in March next year. I've nearly written it. There's a lot of material already formed so I've got time maybe, to write some more or re-think it. Some of the promotion on 'Maestoso' I've still got to do. A radio tour. That's really a prime thing I must do if I'm not doing any gigs. Hopefully, at the same time I'll do press interviews as well.

"I'm looking for two more musicians as well, so really, I've got a lot cut out for the next six months."

It certainly looks that way! Still, with so many bands around nowadays the only way to do it 'is' the hard way...



WOOLLY
WOLSTENHOLME



URIAH HEEP

