

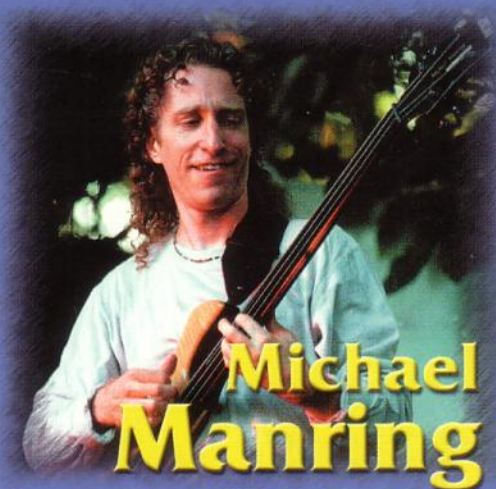
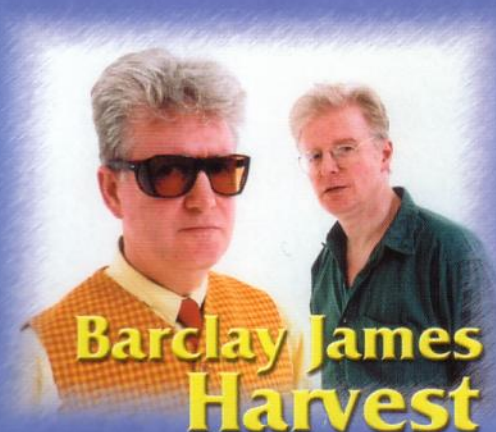
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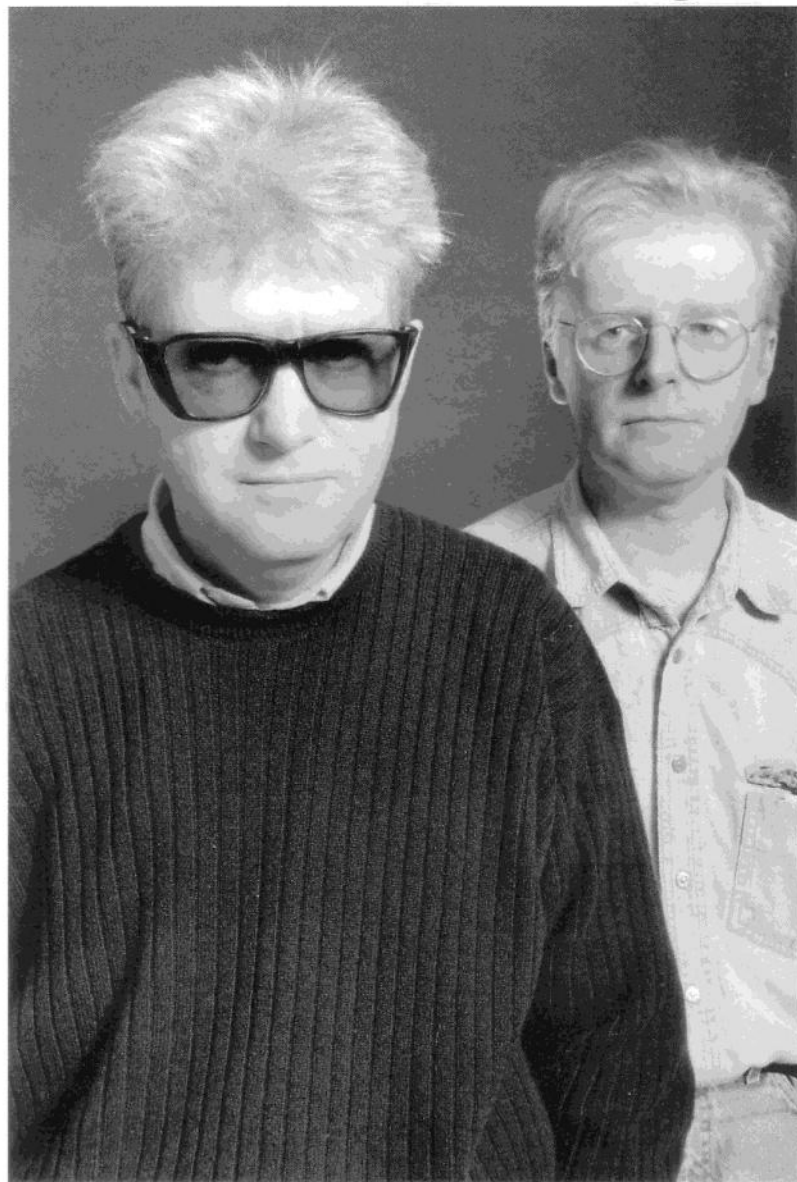


Issue 39 • Summer 2001





# Another vintage 'harvest'



John Lees (left) and Woolly Wolstenholme

**Barclay James Harvest returns once again, through the very progressive 'eyes' of John Lees and 'Woolly' Wolstenholme**

By MARK POWELL

In the annals of rock music, few artists can claim a career spanning three decades. The name Barclay James Harvest has been familiar to followers of progressive music since the 1968 release of their first single for EMI's Parlophone label, "Early Morning." Featuring mellotron and evoking images of the rural English North Country (where the band practiced in an 18th Century farmhouse), the single gained exposure on underground deejay John Peel's influential show on BBC Radio One. This led to a contract with EMI's new progressive label, Harvest Records.

John Lees (guitar, recorder, vocals), Stuart "Woolly" Wolstenholme (keyboards, guitars, vocals), Les Holroyd (bass, guitar, keyboards, vocals) and Mel Pritchard (drums, percussion), teamed up with producer Norman Smith, (who had worked with The Beatles and Pink Floyd), and Royal College of Music dropout Robert John Godfery (later of The Enid) as their orchestral arranger. They produced four albums of breathtaking pastoral beauty for the label, all of which pioneered the fusion of orchestra and rock band. Choosing to tour with a 48-piece orchestra brought financial disaster to BJH and their management. This led to the band abandoning use of an orchestra, being dropped by the Harvest label and eventually signing with Polydor records.

Constant touring of the British college circuit and a new record deal saw Barclay James Harvest gradually escape the mire and achieve a commercial breakthrough. Albums such as *Everyone Is Everybody Else*, *Live*, *Time Honoured Ghosts*, *Octoberon* and *Gone To Earth* saw the band reach an ever-growing audience. Real success began with the overwhelming response in Germany and Switzerland to the *Gone To Earth* album in 1977. The LP achieved million-selling status and saw BJH elevated to performing large arenas to audiences in excess of 10,000.

As the status of Barclay James Harvest continued to grow, shows got larger and musical divisions began to arise. Woolly Wolstenholme had long been an advocate of maintaining the band's classical influences, while Les Holroyd, in particular, favored a different direction. Prior to the recording of *Eyes Of The Universe* in 1979, Wolstenholme departed the fold. He released a solo album, *Maestoso*, and toured with a band of the same name supporting Judy Tzuke and Saga.

He also wrote film scores for British animation company Cosgrove Hall, before abandoning music to become an organic farmer in South Wales.

Barclay James Harvest continued growing from strength to strength, initially bringing in session keyboard players Kevin McAlea and Colin Brown, and later Bias Boshell, to augment their sound onstage and on record. *Eyes Of The Universe* presented a more commercial approach, reaching platinum status in Germany. The subsequent German tour was a success of monumental proportions, with BJH headlining over acts such as Dire Straits and The Police at festivals, and culminating in a free concert on the steps of the Reichstag in West Berlin, next to the wall dividing the city at that time.

Televised throughout Europe, the concert increased the band's stature, with the Les Holroyd song "Life is for Living" being released as a single and attaining chart success. A string of albums followed in quick succession: *Turn Of The Tide*, *A Concert For The People — Berlin*, *Ring Of Changes* and *Victims Of Circumstance*. Although each album attained vast sales in Europe, the musical direction taken by BJH and producer Pip Williams disappointed longtime followers. Following a three-year hiatus, the band re-emerged with *Face To Face*, a heralded return to form resulting in another long European tour which included a free performance in East Berlin to 100,000 people in

Treptower Park. A subsequent live album, *Glasnost*, was their last release in a commercially successful decade.

*Welcome To The Show* was issued in 1990 — another well-crafted effort. The band embarked on a 25th anniversary tour in 1992. *Caught In The Light*, released in 1993, was the band's last album for Polydor U.K., and sold poorly, partially due to a lack of promotion. This downturn in fortunes was compounded in 1994 when a long-running legal action was brought against the band by Robert Godfrey, which threatened to destroy BJH creatively and financially. The action was dismissed by the High Court in March 1995. The band subsequently wrote material for *River Of Dreams*, released in Germany and Austria only in 1997.

Throughout the years following Woolly Wolstenholme's departure, the gulf between material written by John Lees and that written by Les Holroyd grew ever wider. Following a German tour in 1997, it was announced that Barclay James Harvest would be taking a sabbatical so individual members could concentrate on solo projects. John Lees announced his intention to work with Woolly Wolstenholme for the first time in nearly 20 years, and the pair began work on the *Nexus* album — a collection of new songs that stylistically recalled the band's "golden era," and reworkings of classic BJH material such as "Mockingbird," "Hymn," "The Iron Maiden," and "Titles."

The album was released under the moniker Barclay James Harvest Through the Eyes of John Lees, and featured Craig Fletcher on bass and vocals and Kevin Whitehead on drums. The album's new material including "Starbright," "Brave New World," "Float" and "Festival" was a breath of fresh air to the long-term BJH faithful. Lees and Wolstenholme had successfully steered their music in a direction more akin to the respected BJH albums of the '70s, adding production values worthy of a new millennium and reawakening the interest of many who strayed.

*Nexus* was followed by a successful German tour, which saw the band augmented further by the addition of Jeff Leach on keyboards. The subsequent live album, *Revival*, was released last year and featured sterling renditions of classic material such as "She Said,"

"For No One," "Mockingbird," "Poor Man's Moody Blues" and revealed a new piece, "New Song (Old Story)," perhaps one of the finest to emerge from BJH in many years. The *Revival* album whetted appetites of many BJH fans in the U.K., who hadn't witnessed Lees and Wolstenholme on the same stage for 21 years, or seen Lees perform live in Britain since 1992.

When a three-date tour of the U.K. was announced in January this year, it was received with great delight by many, including this writer. John Lees and Woolly Wolstenholme made themselves available prior to shows in Bristol and London to discuss the *Nexus* project, future album plans plus separate opinions and recollections on the history of Barclay James Harvest.

With the first signs of spring in the air, Lees and Wolstenholme were relaxed and open backstage at The Anson Rooms at Bristol University, location of the first BJH Through the Eyes of ... concert. The discussion continued at London's Astoria theatre.

Lees began by explaining circumstances that led to the *Nexus* album, and working again with Woolly Wolstenholme. "As far as I was concerned, the original band with Les and Mel had run totally out of steam and it was suggested that we take a sabbatical. In truth, I suppose I wandered away from the band," he reflected.

"I didn't want to stop working and had already made plans to start working with Woolly, so it was agreed by everyone that I could work under the name Barclay James Harvest Through the Eyes of John Lees. It was a contractual thing, really. It will be the same for the other two members of the band if they do anything — Barclay James Harvest Through the Eyes of Les Holroyd. On the albums I've done and the tours, the perception on artwork and posters is that the band is Barclay James Harvest. I don't think there would be much mileage in albums and tours happening under the name of John Lees and Woolly Wolstenholme, as the name BJH has always been more important than the individuals in it."

Lees was candid about the reasons for working with Woolly Wolstenholme once again. "I think a lot of the main drive in the arrangements went when Woolly left the band. He was a safe pair of

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hands that kept the material to a high standard and within the idiom of the original band. The intention on *Nexus* was to go back to that key sound, which we'd both been very much involved in.

"I think Barclay James Harvest had got too far removed from that sound and had evolved into this Euro middle-of-the-road material that didn't satisfy me at all. I wanted to relive those days musically, which is why there were some reworkings of old tracks on the album. Contractually, the record company wanted something from our old catalogue to be on *Nexus*, and it was a nice opportunity to revisit the material and to rediscover the kind of things we had done previously."

Lees believes the artistic success of *Nexus* is due to the manner in which the album's material was composed. "I think the album works because there was nobody else involved in the writing except the two of us. I found it really easy to work with Woolly after all that time. We grew up together and were at school together. The only thing that kept us apart was distance, and so we only had contact by phone. Once we'd re-established contact there was no problem musically. One of the first things we did was to record 'Sitting Upon a Shelf,' which was something that had been left over from the early days of the band."

"I pulled it out and said, 'We should finish this.' I thought that if we could do that, it would be a good indication that we could be creative together once again. It worked really well and the rest of *Nexus* followed on from there."

The origins of Barclay James Harvest stem from two local blues and soul bands in the Oldham area of Northwest England. John Lees and Woolly Wolstenholme had been in an art-school band called The Sorcerers, later evolving into The Keepers. Les Holroyd and Mel Pritchard had been in another semi-professional local outfit going under the name Heart and Soul and the Wicked. In 1966, members of both acts merged to form The Blues Keepers, originally a six-piece band whose numbers dwindled to comprise Wolstenholme, Lees, Holroyd and Pritchard.

In 1967 the band changed to Barclay James Harvest, (after drawing the three names from a hat filled with various options). They turned professional thanks to local businessman John Crowther, who became their first manager. "We came together out of two separate bands in Oldham playing blues and rhythm and blues, soul and so on. That was the music people wanted to hear at the time," Lees explains. "As we began to discover the new bands who were just emerging we veered more toward folk and classical influences."

"Initially we were very folk oriented. The band was really born out of us emulating our musical heroes at the time. I was particularly into Buffalo Springfield and the early Byrds albums."

John Crowther rented a farmhouse in the rural village of Diggle, just outside of Manchester, and the band lived communally, writing and rehearsing their own material. The band found itself the subject of a short television documentary by Granada television, which led to the offer of a one-off single deal with EMI's Parlophone label in 1968. In April that year the single "Early Morning" b/w "Mr. Sunshine" was released, gaining radio airplay. The single was an indication of the musical direction that BJH would pursue. The A-side relied heavily on use of mellotron at a time when few musicians actually possessed such an instrument.

Even at this early stage, BJH was keen on utilizing the sounds of orchestra in its music. It became a sound that would characterize the music of Barclay James Harvest. "We rented the mellotron for the session that produced "Early Morning" from a guy in Derby," says John. "After the session he didn't want it back so we acquired it. After that we used it on most of our material."

Wolstenholme adds, "The orchestral influence had always been there. Before we were 'rock' musicians, we'd all meddled in other forms of music. I was in a brass band for a while playing tenor horn, although not very successfully, and John had played the saxophone and oboe. This led to a kind of mock chamber orchestra instrumentation on our early demos. Even though those early songs are not that successful, there are attempts at imitating instruments like a French horn and so on."

"When we came to do 'Early Morning,' we'd heard the mellotron on records by Traffic, Simon Dupree and the Big Sound, The Beatles and The Moody Blues, so we decided to try and get one. When we acquired a mellotron we utilized the instrument to its fullest potential."

Shortly after the release of the first single, BJH linked up with leading London agency Blackhill Enterprises, (who had Pink Floyd, Kevin Ayres, Roy Harper and The Edgar Broughton Band on their books). They secured an appearance at one of the first rock concerts to be held at London's Roundhouse, supporting The Gun (featuring Adrian and Paul Gurrvitz). After the band had finished their show they were approached by ex-Royal College of Music student Robert Godfrey.

Wolstenholme recalls, "Robert was a wunderkind from the Royal College of Music. He heard us and saw that he could realize his ambition of conducting an orchestra through us. Following the Roundhouse gig he introduced himself to us and said that he wanted to arrange our music for an orchestra and would help assemble the musicians. Our manager employed him to act as our arranger and our dalliance with orchestras began there."

By this time the band had secured a contract with EMI's progressive label, Harvest Records, and released another single. The self-titled *Barclay James Harvest* album appeared in 1970 and contained several major orchestral pieces, including the epic "Dark Now My Sky." The album credited The Barclay James Harvest Symphony Orchestra, which in reality comprised music students from the New Symphonia.

Wolstenholme feels that the opportunities afforded by the orchestral direction were a revelation. "I wasn't the instigator of heading in an orchestral direction, but I did embrace it wholeheartedly" he says. "Rather than dabble in it, I was totally convinced that the orchestral sound was the musical way forward, and I still am."

BJH followed the release of their debut album with a short four-date tour of Britain, which saw the band accompanied onstage by their own orchestra. "Touring with an orchestra was an enormous logistical exercise" adds Lees. "I remember playing the Weely Festival with one and doing a series of British concerts. The further north you got in the U.K. the smaller the orchestra became! It was a fantastic experience to stand behind all these musicians at the back of a hall and add a bit of anonymity to the proceedings."

"Musically speaking, it wasn't as restrictive as you might think. There were opportunities for solos and the music wasn't all regi-

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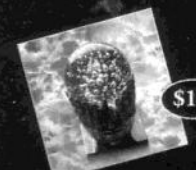

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mented. As long as you finished a solo when you were supposed to, there was room for improvisation."

On their 1971 follow up album, *Once Again*, BJH scaled creative heights that few bands reached during the golden age of progressive rock. "Mockingbird," "She Said," "Song For the Dying" and "Galadriel" are classics of the orchestral progressive genre. Although sales were initially disappointing, the album has become regarded as a BJH classic.

*Barclay James Harvest And Other Short Stories* followed on the heels of *Once Again*, although by this time Robert Godfrey had been dismissed as orchestral arranger and Martyn Ford was brought in. Although not as cohesive as their previous effort, ... *Other Short Stories* contained many fine tracks. "Medicine Man," "The Poet" and "After the Day" would remain live favorites for years to come. By the time the band recorded its final album for Harvest, *Baby James Harvest*, the financial cost of taking an orchestra on tour had taken its toll.

"The whole enterprise cost a fortune and I don't think that we recovered from it for years after," recalls Lees. "Our manager's business went straight down the pan and we had to do a lot of work to cover what it had cost. Financially, it was something we lived to regret."

When asked how he views those formative albums, Lees responds, "With those albums there was always a time factor involved. You can hear it on some pieces where the timing of the orchestra never got up to the pace it was supposed to be in the arrangements, and we just had to live with it because of the expense of session fees and so on. Even though the members of the orchestra were students, they weren't really prepared to go the extra mile to get a piece right without getting paid for it! It was the same in rehearsals, too. They were also dominated by the cost factor."

Indeed, the *Baby James Harvest* album was to feature only one orchestrated track, Woolly Wolstenholme's "Moonwater." The recording sessions were strained due to Wolstenholme spending time at Abbey Road studios in London, while Lees, Holroyd and Pritchard were working at the newly opened Strawberry Studios in Stockport —

some 200 miles to the north and owned by the members of 10cc.

Woolly recalls, "I did 'Moonwater' in isolation. I think on that track the fission was more apparent than it would be normally. I spent a lot of time on that at Abbey Road studios whilst the others recorded in Stockport. I did appear on 'Summer Soldier' and 'A Hundred Thousand Smiles Out.' But the bizarre thing was that I got a credit for arranging 'Summer Soldier' by the others on the album sleeve. You don't thank someone for an arrangement when they're part of the band! Onstage I don't say, 'Thanks John for that great solo.' I didn't think it was that healthy and it was around this time that we left Harvest records."

Although described as "ashtray material" by John Lees some years later thanks to the album's rushed production, *Baby James Harvest* did contain his masterful work "Summer Soldier." And "Moonwater" provided an impressive climax to a mixed effort. Unfortunately, the album received a muted response and was the first in a string of disastrous events that nearly led to the band's demise.

An ill-conceived tour of South Africa resulted in student protests and threats of violence to band members upon their return to Britain. This, coupled with the band's dire financial position, caused BJH to re-think its strategy. During this lull in activity, John Lees took the opportunity to enter Abbey Road studios in the weeks leading up to Christmas 1972, to record a series of songs that went unused by the band.

With ex-Pretty Things member Wally Allen in the producer's chair, Lees assembled musicians including Rod Argent, and two members of the Pretty Things — Skip Alan and Gordon Edwards — to record tracks for his solo album, *A Major Fancy*. The album was completed in January 1973 at Strawberry Studios, with Eric Stewart and Kevin Godley from 10cc offering assistance. John explains, "I had no intention of quitting the band and opting for a permanent solo career. I was in London; I had two weeks to kill and a bunch of songs that I wanted to record. The guy I was working with, Wally Allen, was up for it and so we went into the studio and did it."

*A Major Fancy* contained many commendable tracks, (including the first recorded appearance of the classic "Child of the Universe").

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But it remained unreleased for four years. The album was a victim of BJH leaving Harvest and signing to Polydor Records in 1973. Contractual conditions dictated that EMI Records was unable to release any unheard BJH product for at least three years. A *Major Fancy* finally saw release in July 1977, on the mid-price Harvest Heritage label. Lees adds, "I liked the album when I did it, but I kept it in a box for a long time. EMI released it in 1977 with a budget cover and so on, but I didn't realize that the album actually belonged to me. As soon as the rights reverted to me I took it off EMI and sat on it." The album appeared on CD for the first time in 1999 as part of John's contract with Eagle Records.

Barclay James Harvest fulfilled contractual obligations to Harvest by releasing three singles under their own name and one single under the pseudonym "Bombadil" — "Breathless" b/w "When the City Sleeps." A new recording contract with Polydor meant BJH was free from the shackles of debt to EMI Records, and their energies could be diverted to creative matters once again.

This bore immediate fruit with release of the excellent *Everyone Is Everybody Else* in 1974. The album contained many classics including a reworked "Child of the Universe," "Crazy City," "For No One" and "Paper Wings." This album was followed by release of the excellent *Barclay James Harvest* the same year, which became the band's first chart success. With the band's fortunes and popularity growing, a decision was made to record the next BJH album in San Francisco with producer Elliot Mazer.

Wolstenholme has mixed feelings about the venture: "I had the view that we shouldn't be recording the album in America, but the others thought it was wonderful, especially Les who thought that Crosby, Stills and Nash were 'it' as far as music was concerned. It was a rite of passage for Les to record in San Francisco with all those influences around him. Nobody really understood my song 'Beyond the Grave' in America. When we came back to England and heard the final mix, I thought the album was OK, but I didn't think the USA was the right environment for us."

*Time Honoured Ghosts* was a further step in an upward direction for BJH and contained many classics such as "In My Life," "Titles,"

"Jonathan," "Moongirl" and "Beyond the Grave." Indeed, the album's success prompted Polydor to consider using Elliot Mazer to produce the next BJH offering. John recalls, "We went back to the States a year later to do another album with Elliot, the plan being to do a short tour of the East Coast, finish in Los Angeles and then head up to San Francisco to record our second album."

"Unfortunately, we didn't get to record a second album with Elliot and came home. We did some shows with *Be Bop Deluxe* and *Don McLean* and we went down OK, but unless you work constantly in the States you don't make any impact. By that time Europe had kicked in for us and so we concentrated on building up a following there."

The band returned to England to record *Octoberon* at Strawberry Studios in Stockport, with in-house engineer David Rohl as co-producer. This began a three-album cycle of records with Rohl producing. Says Wolstenholme, "David made us sound more like a band on record." Indeed, the success both creatively and commercially of the albums Rohl made with BJH was striking. *Octoberon* contained further high spots, such as Lees's "Suicide" and Wolstenholme's epic "Ra."

*Octoberon* also saw Barclay James Harvest's prestige in Germany begin to rise. This was eventually to reach even larger proportions with the release of 1977's *Gone To Earth*. "The *Gone To Earth* album broke us in Germany," recalls Lees. "At that time we did a huge amount of work and our tours were so big and so costly that we didn't make a decent living out of it. We were self-managed, and managed to secure a tour of Germany as support act to Electric Light Orchestra. Halfway through the tour ELO pulled out because they'd had a number-one hit in the USA. We fulfilled the rest of the dates and I think that's when we got noticed."

"I first became aware of this when we played a place called the Philipshalle in Dusseldorf. It held 5,500 people. We filled the place and our success went on from there. Unfortunately, it locked us out of the U.K. for a few years."

*Gone To Earth* was a majestic album, opening with the classic "Hymn" and featuring another John Lees classic, "Poor Man's Moody

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Blues," addressing a sarcastic comment by a music critic following a concert at the Colston Hall in Bristol. Unfortunately, the album's release in the middle of the punk-rock explosion saw a backlash of unfair derision in the U.K. music press, leading to a war of words between band and newspaper reporters. To this day, thanks to years of unjustified critical sniping, both Lees and Wolstenholme have an uneasy relationship with journalists.

Woolly recalls, "I don't know what the press will say next as they've exhausted their arsenal of insults. It doesn't really matter to me anymore. It's when they don't talk about you that you should worry. The worst thing for me was when the music press began to criticize our fans, which was not and is not their remit. It's their job to take an artist to task, but when you insult a band's audience that's one step too far. At that point we refused to talk to any journalists. They still carried on writing their shit anyway!"

Regardless of the negative press, both *Gone To Earth* and the subsequent *Live Tapes* sold in ever-increasing quantities. At this point BJH appeared as guest musicians on a concept album written and conceived by David Rohl and released under the name Mandalaband — *The Eye of Wendor: Prophecies*. Based on a Tolkien-esque storyline, the album featured not only BJH, particularly Woolly Wolstenholme, but also The Hallé Orchestra, Justin Hayward, Maddy Prior, 10cc and the late Paul Young (of Sad Café and Mike and the Mechanics). Although failing to sell in vast quantities, the album is perhaps one of the better examples of a conceptual work.

The recording and release of *XII* occurred in 1978, the first album on which Martin Lawrence acted as co-producer. It was a very pleasing work which featured many outstanding compositions, including the majestic "In Search of England" and "Harbour" by Wolstenholme, "The Closed Shop" and "Nova Lepidoptera" by Lees, and "Berlin" by Les Holroyd.

The release of *XII* enabled BJH to build even further on their German success, and the band embarked on yet another mammoth tour. Despite the quality of that album, all was not well within the band's ranks. Wolstenholme had grown increasingly disillusioned with the group's musical direction. During rehearsals for what would become the *Eyes Of The Universe* album, he quit the band. Woolly is forthright when discussing his reasons for leaving BJH at that time.

"When we dispensed with the orchestra and I took over the mantle of providing the classical influence, my songs were kind of apart from the rest of the material," he says. "Toward the end of my period with the band in the '70s, I was feeling more and more isolated. There were two ways I could have looked at it. I could have stuck to my guns and tried to stop the music from going more 'West Coast' in feel and sounding like a third-rate Eagles, but I didn't see the point in doing that. I was acting as a sea anchor and preventing the vessel from heading in a direction it wanted to go. It seemed pretty pointless.

"I had a few years of that ambivalence, not knowing what to do and then one day I had enough and quit. My point was proved after I left. The band went down a road I would have been totally uncomfortable with. The strange thing was that the band had made its fortune on the albums I had been on. After I left I thought that the musical spirit I had perceived to exist within the band had gone."

Wolstenholme's departure failed to halt the commercial progress of the band, although Lees feels it put him in a position he had never experienced previously with regard to arrangements for his music. "From my point of view, Woolly leaving meant that you had to compensate for what was replacing him; paid session musicians," he says. "Before, I'd work with Woolly more than the other two guys. I was suddenly in the position of having to work on my

own and going to somebody who had no empathy with what I was writing, to put keyboard arrangements to it. That situation suited Les more than it did me, so I think things went downhill from there. I had more responsibility for my own songs and based that upon how other people perceived them."

When *Eyes Of The Universe* appeared in late 1979, it revealed a more "commercial" approach with emphasis on shorter and less complicated, (although equally effective), material. Sales in Europe were phenomenal, with the album reaching platinum status in Germany within months. The band embarked on a large tour that saw success beyond anything previously envisaged, selling about 450,000 tickets. Recalls Lees, "It was a phenomenal amount and was unprecedented in Germany at that time, although I hasten to add that we didn't see any of the money!"

"One of the places we didn't play was West Berlin. As a result, the agency we were with made so much bloody money that they decided to stage a free concert on the steps of the Reichstag! The gig was sponsored by a guy called Axel Springer, who owned the German equivalent to the Hearst publishing empire. He had bought a skyscraper right next to the Berlin Wall as an act of defiance, and I think the idea to play at the Reichstag was his idea. At that time the building was in a horseshoe-shaped piece of land that was almost surrounded by the wall. Whatever went on there was going to be heard in East Berlin."

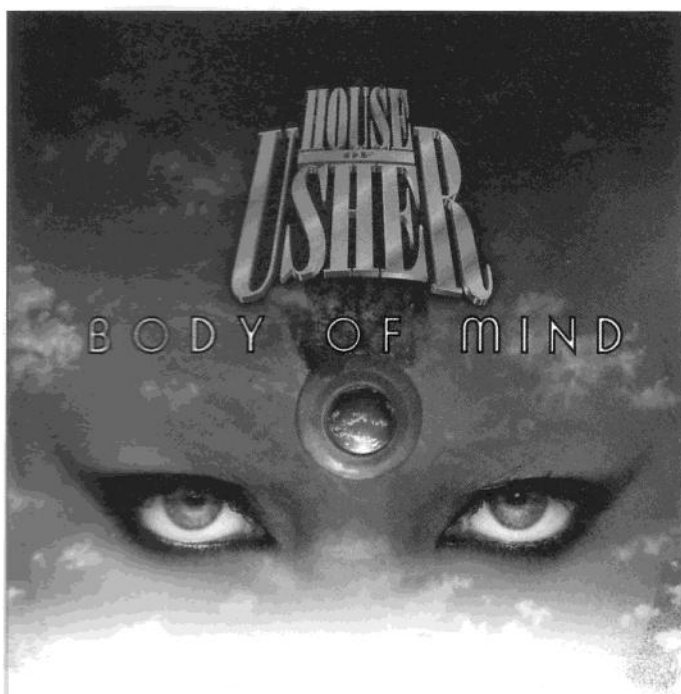
The so-called "Concert For the People" on Aug. 30, 1980 was the peak of Barclay James Harvest's success in Germany. The political impact of the concert, later televised throughout Europe, was not realized by the band at the time. It was credited years later for playing a part in the liberalization of the East German regime, and the eventual fall of the Berlin Wall.

"Recently, we went back to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Wall coming down and we actually played on the steps of the Reichstag once again," Lees says. "It was acknowledged that our concert played a part in moving public opinion in East Germany, which eventually led to the political changes in 1989. It was quite shocking to be standing there 20 years on. The park we played in is now being turned into a multi-story car park!"

The resulting "superstar" status of Barclay James Harvest in Germany sat uncomfortably with John Lees. "I didn't like playing to such large audiences at all. I think I must have rebelled against it in some way, as I was being portrayed as some kind of superstar. For one thing I wasn't making the kind of bread that those people make! It was a bit of a misnomer, really, as we'd be playing in this gilded cage to 17,000 people in Germany on many occasions who were 20 feet below you and were obscured by all the stage lighting. Then







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you'd come back to England and nobody on the street would give you a second look. I didn't like it and in retrospect, I probably did rebel against it."

In the midst of all this activity from his former bandmates, Woolly Wolstenholme embarked upon a solo career. He quickly recruited guitarist Steve Broomhead and drummer Kim Turner (with whom he had worked on the Mandalaband album), and entered Strawberry Studios to record his majestic album *Maestoso*.

"I left BJH in mid-1979 and got to grips with writing songs for a solo album," Woolly recalls. "I'd got some material left over that I'd written as my proposed contributions to *Eyes Of The Universe*, and I assembled a band around me and went into the studio. I had some cash at the time because I'd just left a successful band, and paid for everything myself. Coming from a band with three writers, you get used to the idea that one member will come up with something in one style and someone else will write in a different style again.

"It was a bit of a shock to have to come up with a couple of uptempo numbers, a big production, a quiet song and so on! Whilst over the years I'd written all styles of song, I suddenly found myself having to put all those styles together and make an album, which I found a little daunting."

Of the songs that finally appeared on *Maestoso*, "American Excess," "Lives on the Line," "A Prospect of Whitby," and "Gates of Heaven" were offered for the *Eyes Of The Universe*. When comparing those pieces stylistically with the material BJH recorded on that album, it is easy to see the wide creative gulf between Wolstenholme and his ex-bandmates. Woolly adds, "John has similar stories where a song was rejected by everyone else in BJH only to have them recorded five years later. The song "Maestoso" had been around since 1974 and was going to be on *Everyone Is Everybody Else* until our producer Rodger Bain said, 'It doesn't seem to fit.'

"I thought that wasn't really valid, as I always had my one song per album and they never fitted in with anything else! My nose was put out of joint a bit with that as 'Maestoso' was my epic, a song I'd spent a good two years of my life working on, extending it all the time. It seems very unfair when your masterwork is rejected by your bandmates! At least it saw the light of day eventually!"

Wolstenholme's solo opus was released in October 1980 by Polydor records. He subsequently put together a band, also called "Maestoso," with Broomhead, Turner and bassist Terry Grady. They toured Europe as support act to singer Judy Tzuke in May and June, 1981.

Considering the strength of its material, sales of *Maestoso* were disappointing. Undaunted, Woolly began work on a series of demos for a proposed second album. With a working title of *Black Box*, the demos Wolstenholme produced are a tantalizing taste of what would have been a very creditable album. Regretfully, Polydor declined the option of releasing a second album shortly after Woolly had completed a tour of Europe with Saga in 1982. Demos of *Black Box* were added to the *Maestoso* album and were released on CD by Voiceprint in 1994 under the title, *Songs From The Black Box*.

Despite lackluster response his solo projects and considering the commercial heights reached by BJH, Wolstenholme says he had no qualms about leaving the band. "I didn't feel any regrets about the success of BJH at all. The building blocks of that success were already there when I was with the band. *Time Honoured Ghosts*, *Octoberon*, *Gone To Earth* and *XII* were the formative albums, and *Gone To Earth* was a big seller. I perceived that what I contributed was still hanging on there. The thing is, the music ceased to become an interest.

"I was almost on *Eyes Of The Universe* and knew most of the material that appeared on it. I must admit I wasn't that impressed with most of it. I thought that musically the band got worse and worse after I left, but the occasional good songs still got through. I thought too much of the material was stadium rock designed to keep the ball rolling. But I dare say that some people might think some of the things I have done aren't to their taste. The only twinge I had was when I went to Germany to promote my solo album and I was watching TV and all of a sudden John, Les and Mel appeared on a news show arriving somewhere by plane. I must admit I thought that I should be doing that too!"

For a time, Wolstenholme teamed up with David Rohl as a writer of incidental music for television films. He recalls, "My TV music



period began when BJH were taking a break. Unlike the others, I couldn't afford to do nothing during these periods. So I did radio jingles with David Rohl, who produced two BJH albums and did the *Eye Of Wendor* album. The chap who did the art on the sleeve for *Eye Of Wendor* worked for an animation company, Cosgrove Hall. Through him, David and I did two or three things for them and then I did the music for the children's animated series *Cockleshell Bay*.

"Eventually, all that came to end and I became an organic farmer. It was my wife's idea to go into farming. It wasn't a case of her saying, 'You have to do this,' but more a result of me not knowing what I could do. The musical side of things had either been beaten out of me or wasn't forthcoming anymore. And after 15 years of not having to hustle for work, I didn't know what I should do. I think it was a case of hanging on to someone else's dream."

Meanwhile, the 1980s saw mixed creative fortunes for Barclay James Harvest. The began with a European hit single, "Life is For Living," a Les Holroyd composition that premiered at the Berlin concert. It was a pop-oriented number and pushed BJH into new territory. This was followed in quick succession by the albums *Turn Of The Tide*, *Ring Of Changes* and *Victims Of Circumstance*. The last two albums chocked up more huge European sales and new fans, but to the diehard BJH faithful this musical direction was less than satisfactory.

This dissatisfaction also hung over John Lees. "In the '80s we came under huge pressure to have a hit single," he remembers. "We'd had a big hit album with *Gone To Earth*, which had no single taken from it at all. Yet the album sold over 1 million copies. I couldn't see why we suddenly had to aim at the singles market. When you get into the competition of trying to come up with a hit, everything else gets destroyed creatively. It's horrible, because you start writing songs for the wrong reasons and I think you can hear that on some of our '80s output."

"*Victims Of Circumstance* was a terrible mistake. That happened because the band weren't talking to each other and a really strong producer got brought in by the record company to recoup the massive amount of money invested into the band. When there is no consen-

sus within the band itself, decisions get made for you — like getting backing vocalists in to make an album with a more 'pop' approach and get to a larger audience. Unfortunately it had the opposite effect. I think that album destroyed the band's image. From the 'Berlin' album onward you began to see a progressively downward slide in sales in some quarters, as our core following weren't happy with what was happening to us musically."

This downward creative slide abated somewhat with the release in 1987 of *Face To Face*. The album contained many strong songs from both Lees and Holroyd, including "He Said Love," "Africans," "All My Life" and "Alone in the Night." John comments, "I think *Face To Face* was a revival creatively as it was an attempt to work as a band once again. Although at the end of the day only certain tracks were recorded with the whole band in the studio."

During the *Face To Face* tour of Europe, BJH was invited by the East Berlin senate to play a concert celebrating the 1,000th anniversary of Berlin as a city. "We tried to do a simultaneous concert in East Berlin at the time we did our concert at the Reichstag, but the authorities in the East wanted to charge admission, so it didn't happen," Lees says. "In 1987 we were asked to play a free concert on that side of the city, which we did in a place called Treptower Park."

"At first the authorities wanted to stage it on a place called the Island of Youth. But we discovered that they wanted us to play there in order to control the numbers of people attending the concert, and that it was to be open to grace and favor Communist Party workers only. So we said, 'No way!' They relented and relocated the event and threw the event open. We got over 100,000 people at that show, although the East German media never reported it at the time."

The East Berlin concert on July 14, 1987 was released on both CD and video as *Glasnost*, and was screened by TV stations across Europe. Following this BJH took a two-year break before emerging in 1990 with the album, *Welcome To The Show*. It again proved to be a mixture of commendable work and commercial awareness, the highlights being "Cheap the Bullet," "Lady Macbeth" and Lees's autobiographical "John Lennon's Guitar." In 1992 the band embarked on a 25th anniversary tour, including a performance at London's

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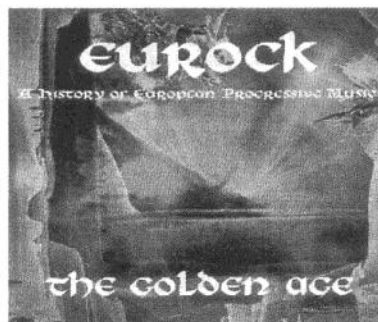
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Town and Country Club, which was released as a commercial video.

The 1993 release of *Caught In The Light* was a less satisfying effort, as by this time Lees and Holroyd had reverted to working separately on their respective compositions. It was to be the last BJH album for Polydor U.K., and marked the end of a 19-year association.

In April 1996, Barclay James Harvest signed a contract with Polydor Records in Hamburg and their subsequent album, *River Of Dreams*, was released only in Austria and Germany. The album included the outstanding John Lees songs "Children of the Disappeared" and "Three Weeks to Despair," and was a more cohesive effort than *Caught In The Light*.

"Our last album, *River Of Dreams*, had two tracks recorded as a group, but then the sessions quickly degenerated into people coming into the studio on their own to record their songs and never the twain shall meet," Lees says. "The album was released in Germany and Austria only as the perception was that it probably wouldn't sell in Britain. I think it's a shame because there are some good songs on that album. The only two songs that had a band on it were 'River of Dreams' and 'Yesterday's Heroes.' There's nobody but me, a computer and Martin Lawrence on my tracks! Jeff Leach played keyboards as well, but I don't think you can expect people to turn on to music without real musicians making up the total sum of parts."

Following release of *River Of Dreams*, Lees's increasing disillusionment with the direction of Barclay James Harvest came to the fore and he announced his intention to pursue solo work. Barclay James Harvest was officially put on "sabbatical" at the same moment John Lees established a working relationship with Woolly Wolstenholme once again. Woolly explains, "It was fortuitous, it was unplanned synchronicity that I should exit my old life and that BJH should be put on hold at the same time. My last life crumbled, both relationship wise and business wise. I came back to stay with my parents in Oldham, and via Keith Damone of the BJH fan club I went for a drink with John and we re-established a relationship."

"I went to see John's son play cornet in the local brass band and over the ensuing months we got together to play some music, although nothing serious at that point. Someone then said, 'If you're going to do something together, just do it!' And so we went back to a track that was never finished from 1969 called 'Sitting Upon a Shelf' and finished it. The thing was we were just playing around with acoustic guitars and strumming to see what came out. We were just testing the temperature of the water, a bit like this tour, to see if there was still a demand for our music."

"When we'd put down a few loose tracks, which we felt gave a feel to where our music was at, we went to our management company who got us a deal with Eagle Records on the basis of the audition tapes. We're having to pass auditions at 54 years of age! No doubt when we come to do our next album we'll put a couple of songs down and present it to someone and go through the same thing again."

Says Lees, "I'd had enough of recording in a synthetic manner. That's why *Nexus* was recorded in a 'real' way. If we needed drums we used a drum kit. It wasn't a drum kit played into a computer and then used to fire sample drums. All of us were in the studio to play a backing track and then all overdubs were done onto a real backing track. I think that *Nexus* is a good springboard to the next generation of music that we produce. If the record company so deems it, then we'll carry on making records."

Woolly adds, "Although the orchestral direction is back, we aren't just going through the motions churning out the old material. 'Mockingbird' was our clarion call from the early days and I extended it and rewrote the center section, which is now totally different from the original center section. I was quite happy with *Nexus*, although in a way we didn't know what we were doing after all those years of not working together in the studio. We both had an end goal to produce an album with variety and shape."

"The finished album was almost like toxic shock to the fans because they had got used to what can arguably be described as a synthetic band. We broke that mold with *Nexus*. And although there's nothing wrong with the album, it does sound a bit rough and ready, like a band playing live in the studio. In my opinion that's exactly how the album should have sounded."

The *Nexus* album was received as a triumphant return to form and was followed by a series of German, Swiss and Austrian dates with a

band comprising John and Woolly, Craig Fletcher on bass and vocals, Kevin Whitehead on drums and Jeff Leach on keyboards. The tour was captured on tape and was released as *Revival* in 2000. It revealed a band in top musical form, with a very evident enthusiasm for performing.

The Barclay James Harvest Through the Eyes of John Lees tour also was one of the few still using a mellotron. Lees is jokingly forthright in his opinions on using the instrument on tour. "On our last German tour the mellotron was a pain in the arse! When we got to Austria the venues were so smokey that all the tapes got glued up. I've got this wonderful mini disc recording where the show stopped for mellotron repair work. Woolly had to take the back off the thing and start tinkering around in the middle of our set!"

"I'm trying to wean Woolly away from taking it on the road as mellotron are now doing a CD-ROM with all the mellotron samples on it. He's also had a transparent Perspex back put on it and had these bloody lights installed inside so you can see everything working. It looks like a fish tank! The mellotron does have a distinctive sound that characterizes a lot of the songs, so we wouldn't be without it in some shape or form."

Woolly is equally forthright about going on tour after an 18-year break. "I think the phrase 'soiled underpants' is the most appropriate one to use," he laughs. "It was very nerve-wracking. It wouldn't have been so bad if the band had disbanded in 1985 and John and I were the 'return' if you like. The band had carried on and so we were constantly expecting people in Germany to shout, 'Life is for Living' or say 'Why don't you play the good stuff from the '80s! Amazingly, we didn't get any of that. Our biggest audience had been in Germany, but the people loved it. There was more fun on the stage and the performances were lively. I suppose the next bizarre moment for me was playing my first concert in Britain after such a long time at Bristol University. Now that's out of the way. I don't think there are many more mountains for me to climb!"

A tantalizing glimpse of new material was offered on the *Revival* album in the form of the splendid "New Song (Old Story)." So what of the future for this revitalized incarnation of Barclay James Harvest? "We're prisoners to commerce like anyone else," explains Lees. "But hopefully, someone will come through with a deal for a new studio album."

"I know that *Nexus* has sold more copies than *River Of Dreams* did. A new studio album is in the cards, but we're taking things on a day-to-day basis. We've just played some concerts in Greece, a country we've never played before, and that was an experiment in working without taking all our own equipment with us. We sampled Woolly's mellotron and loaded it into a sampling keyboard and it sounded great."

"Our Greek gigs took us by surprise, as the audience knew all the words to the songs and were full of information about us. It's a shame that we never went there years ago. They were singing along loudly and it was brilliant. We hope the U.K. tour is well received as we pushed our agent into testing the water to see if there's a demand for us. If there is a demand we'll be more than happy to keep on going!"

If the affection with which the band was greeted at the two U.K. shows witnessed by this writer is anything to go by, we've not heard the last of Barclay James Harvest — albeit through the eyes of John Lees and Woolly Wolstenholme. For that, all true connoisseurs of vintage progressive music should be thankful. **Q**

