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## INTERVIEW

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### **PUNK JAZZ?: An interview with John L. Walters and Richard James Burgess of Landscape**

#### **Key Words**

Landscape, production, technology, indie, DIY, electrojazzpop, computermusic

#### **Abstract**

Originally an eight-piece jazz band (1974), briefly a sextet (1975) and ultimately a five-piece, Landscape performed anywhere and everywhere they could in and around London and then further afield, from art colleges to village fetes as well as pub and club venues. I'm not sure if I first saw them at The Nashville or The Music Machine, but in 1977 they were a welcome distraction from and contrast to the pub rock and recycled pub rock of punk.

Landscape released two EPs, *U2XME1X2MUCH* in 1977 and *Workers' Playtime* (1978) on their own Event Horizon label and managed to create quite a buzz around the band, with sold-out gigs, and then in 1979 their eponymous first album on a major label (RCA). They also appeared on the BBC's science programme *Tomorrow's World*, discussing computer programming as well as their electronic drums and wind instruments. It was a sign of things to come.

Before long two of the band were programming the Fairlight for Kate Bush's third album *Never for Ever* (Bush 1980) and the whole band reinvented themselves as an electronic dance band, somewhat incongruously dressing themselves in futuristic vinyl, but soon achieving pop success with 'Einstein a Go-Go' and 'Norman Bates', both tracks from their second album *From the Tea-Rooms of Mars ... to the Hell Holes of Uranus* (Landscape 1981), both quirky, unexpected songs with killer hooks and bizarre videos.

The band would also turn up doing production duties and/or performing on various, often surprising, projects, not least music & dance troupe Shock's deconstructive version of The Glitter Band's 'Angel Face' (Shock 1980), a neglected 7" classic. Meanwhile, Landscape persisted with making their own dance music, although 'European Man' (Landscape 1980) failed to chart despite being issued several times. By the time 1982's *Manhattan Boogie-Woogie* had been released, the moment had gone, as moments often do, and despite a brief incarnation as Landscape III (a trio), the band broke up for good in 1984, with members continuing session and production work, and writing for films and television, including bass player Andy Pask's theme for TV cop drama *The Bill* (Morgan, Pask 1985). [1.]

**Rupert Loydell (RL):** *Thanks for agreeing to this interview. I'd like to start by asking you about the new box set (Landscape 2023). It's pretty substantial and complete. but why now?*

**John L. Walters (JLW):** The main reasons are time, opportunity, rights and technology. We've talked about making a Landscape website for years, to tell our story and gather together information, and Anthony Burrill volunteered to design it about eight years ago. The crucial step, which Richard can tell you more about, was getting back ownership of our best known recordings, including the *Tea-Rooms* album. Pandemic era tech (Zoom, WhatsApp) meant there was an opportunity for the five of us to discuss what we could do once we had the rights back. We already owned the EP-era live recordings, which were digitised in the States by the legendary sound engineer Pete Reiniger (1949-2022), whom Richard knew through the Smithsonian. Then Andy and I took the 16- and 24-track multitracks and master recordings to FX in West London. Before long, we had an enormous amount of high-quality material to sort through.

**Richard James Burgess (RJB):** As John said, the key factor was having the ability to release all eras of our material as a body of work. We had been trying to get access to our three RCA albums for more than 30 years because they contain our best-known work. We are very grateful to Sony for making that possible. It was unbelievably exciting to hear this material in hi-res digital audio. We hadn't heard most of these recordings for more than 40 years. It was also gratifying and thoroughly enjoyable to work together as a band again to piece this jigsaw puzzle of a box set together. It grew significantly in dimension as we went through the material and there are many more recordings that we intend to release.

**RL:** *Let's go back to the 1970s. What on earth made an electric jazz band decide to play the pub music circuit in London? Did you really think you could compete with or take on the stuff that was around at the time?*

**JLW:** We had already developed our live sound playing jazz venues like the Bull's Head and the Phoenix (for the Jazz Centre Society) but you could only play those slots every so often, because there were dozens of more conventional jazz line-ups who could only play those venues. So we aimed to open up new places that would have us – the Speakeasy (noted hangout for rock musicians and road crews), the Swan, and notably the Stapleton, where we were able to build up an audience of loyal locals. (That's where we met Nick Froome and J. J. Jeczalik, who ended up working for us.) We had a lucky break – we won the GLAA (Greater London Arts Association) Young Jazz Musicians 1976 award, which subsidised all our London gigs for two years.

We thought that we were a lot better than most bands on the circuit, but the lack of a guitarist and singer posed a direct obstacle – most bookers said no without listening to a demo tape. But once we had an obvious fan following, an indie record, good press and so on, the more conventional rock venues like the Kensington, Rock Garden, Roxy, Nashville, Music Machine, etc. would consider us – not because they had become more musically open-minded but because we brought our own following along to drink or buy tickets. We also promoted our own gigs at the Music Machine, 100 Club, at some London Town Halls (Hampstead, Fulham, Peckham) and we were booked by Camden

Girls School, various festivals and arts centres such as Brillig in Bath and St Donats in Wales. The colleges also picked up on us once there had been a few reviews and features (in *NME*, *Melody Maker*, *Sounds*, etc.) and before long we were playing bigger venues. We had a second lucky break not long after the GLAA award, when we won a pair of enormous speakers in the Vitavox Live Sound Award. We didn't use these in pubs, but they came into their own when we started playing the larger halls, with what was effectively a hi-fi quality sound system, much of it hand-soldered by Andy, if I remember correctly. With our roadies Martin Bradley (sound) and J. J. (lighting), we made a good impression.

**RJB:** We never really doubted that we could build a following because the audience reactions we were getting from the beginning was strong. In the beginning all or most of the compositions were John's – they were highly creative, and the energy of the band was undeniable. Even when we were playing in odd time signatures, people would be moving to the music. We knew we were onto something. We modified our stage presentation as we progressed out of the jazz circuit. We no longer read music on stage, which meant better eye contact with the audience but required more rehearsals. Also, we brought in a clothes designer (Anne Docherty of Smartino Superbo) so that we would have a more cohesive look. The more we played out live the more immediate the connection between what we were writing and playing and the way the audience responded to us. In answer to your question though, we did whatever gigs were available to us and we created our own circuit because we didn't fit in with the contemporaneous scenes. We had to open up our own venues and bring our own audiences with us. I think that worked in our favour in the long run. The Town Hall gigs we did where we rented the buildings and hired the opening acts (circus acts and comedians) are perfect examples of that.

**RL:** *My own feelings are that the audiences for Landscape at the gigs I saw actually were the same people I saw at concerts by the likes of XTC or Wire, The Only Ones or Simple Minds. People tend to forget that punk didn't stop everything else in pop and rock music dead, and that the likes of Yes and Genesis were still massive, Springsteen was in popular ascent, and many music fans like myself basically ignored punk until keyboards were allowed back in and the shouty gobby three-chord bands moved aside or broke up. I know I wasn't alone in listening to jazz, improv, prog and mainstream rock as well as singer-songwriters at the time. What was your take at the time on punk, and what we now call post-punk?*

**JLW:** By the time punk 'officially' emerged, in the summer of 1976, we were doing a lot of small venues. One night we played the Railway Tavern in Putney (where we'd previously performed with the eight-piece version) and the guy running the gig listened to our soundcheck and put up a chalkboard outside saying 'PUNK JAZZ'. This was well before *Mr Gone!* (Weather Report 1978) And I think you're correct about XTC fans – Landscape probably made some kind of sonic sense to kids who were rejecting older forms of rock, whether for reasons of musical taste or trouser width. We played with a lot of energy, and you can hear some of that on the live recordings on CDs 1 and 4 of *Landscape A Go-Go*.

We supported Rich Kids at Croydon Greyhound, and we were on the Cambridge May Ball bill alongside The Only Ones and Elvis Costello, but we didn't get to hear many

bands of that time live – we were busy playing our own gigs. Peter Capaldi told me that a punk band he sang in once supported us in Glasgow, but I have no clear memory of that. There were a lot of terrific gigs in Scotland.

What you often get in pop, rock and punk is a quirky mix of craft and ideas. The people leading the bands may not be experienced or competent musicians (or even think of themselves as musicians), but they push against or exploit their limitations to make something new. Then their more competent or experienced bandmates bring their skills into play, and new forms of music start to emerge. I was the nearest thing Landscape had to a non-musician.

**RJB:** I am going to contest John's last statement; he is a phenomenal musician and someone I looked up to and learned a great deal from over the years we lived and worked together. Musicians come in many different flavours. Musically speaking, I was never a huge punk fan but what I loved about punk was its energy, its insurrectionist qualities, and the DIY ethos. We manifested and/or borrowed heavily from all three of those. I suspect that's why punks related to us, and we were just plain different than any other music trend going on at the time.

**RL:** *Of course, Landscape didn't respond by shaving their heads or donning jumpsuits, ripped trousers and binbags. Instead, you foregrounded your electronic wind instruments for a while – hence the Tomorrow's World performance and interview – and released two EPs (Landscape 1977, 1978) and then an album (Landscape 1979a) which was full of quirky, accomplished, and sometimes addictive instrumentals. I'm assuming the EPs were mostly sold at gigs? But the album presumably sold enough or got enough critical attention for RCA to justify keeping you on the label?*

**JLW:** The nascent indie distribution networks (Lightning, and to a lesser extent Rough Trade) served us well once we got through the nightmare of manufacture. As you say, we did sell a lot of EPs at gigs, also T-shirts and posters, which helped with cash expenses – diesel, food, B&Bs – though a truck breakdown in Darlington almost forced us off the road for good. We often sold EPs direct to indie record shops that we visited while we were on the road – it was fun to meet the enthusiastic people who ran those places.

Then we applied a bit of lateral thinking to the question 'how are we going to get on *Top of the Pops*? We realised that *Tomorrow's World* was transmitted right before *TOTP* every Thursday on BBC1, so Peter and I went in to see the programme's producers in their Shepherds Bush office with a bunch of synths that we wheeled in on a trolley. The clip that aired (you can still see it on the BBC website) wasn't just about wind instruments, we demonstrated Chris's polyphonic CS80, Richard's SDSV drum synths and Peter's electric trombone, plugged into a pitch-to-voltage synthesizer. The segment was shot in rehearsal at Jackson's Lane Theatre in Highgate, where we'd often played live and had recorded our second EP, *Workers' Playtime* (Landscape 1978), the previous year, with Nick Froome engineering.

'Japan' (Landscape 1979b), the first single from the first album, came out at the time of the *Tomorrow's World* transmission in September 1979. RCA had had the idea that we could release lots of instrumental singles, even suggesting a pop producer, Christopher

Neil, who had worked with Paul Nicholas and our friends Marshall Hain. Instead of Neil (also remembered for appearing in several sex comedy films) we got Greg Walsh, an accomplished engineer-producer who we enjoyed working with. However, in retrospect he took the band's sound in an overly 'smooth' direction. Tracks like 'Japan' and 'The Mechanical Bride' were taking us into a more electro sound, and the *Landscape* LP (1979a) softened that approach.

**RJB:** It was always about the music for us, and we were determined to be as unique as possible. Not just by playing our own material, which we always did, but if anything we wrote or played, remotely reminded one of us of something else, we would rework it. The fashion/appearance side was interesting to me, because it didn't affect the music but it was a way to bridge the gap between how weird we were musically and a wider audience. We were trying to normalize the perception of the band without changing what we did musically. We even had a song called 'Nearly Normal' (released on *Landscape* 1978) and of course 'Norman Bates' (on *Landscape* 1981) had the ironic mantra as its only lyrical content. I came up with a term around that time, 'trend-surfing', when I saw what happened at the beginning of the UK punk/new wave movement. A lot of artists adopted characteristics of those movements to fit in and make their music palatable to those audiences without fundamentally changing the types of songs they wrote. We were so far outside the mainstream that it was hard to pretend we were part of that movement, but we were winning over audiences and building a substantial fanbase. As John said, the smoothing out of the first *Landscape* album in production undercut the power of the live band. The album is well-recorded, and the playing is great but at that time we needed a more hard-edged, energetic representation that captured what we sounded like live – the EPs that were recorded live at gigs, were rough around the edges but they totally captured the feel of who we were at the time.

**RL:** *John, can you explain – in everyday language– what the band were doing with electric trombones and saxophones and what on earth a lyricon is?*

**JLW:** We started as a kind of mini jazz orchestra – the original band under my name expanded to eleven for our last ever gig – but for *Landscape* we reduced the personnel, from eight to six and finally a more sustainable five-piece. So we were always looking for ways to make the band sound bigger. We started with pick-ups and effects pedals on the horns. When I acquired the lyricon in 1978 it gave me a whole new set of sounds and pitches (a six-octave range) that I couldn't have with just soprano sax and flute. The lyricon is a synthesizer that's controlled by both a breath transducer (for attack and amplitude) and a Boehm-style set of keys (like a flute or sax) instead of a piano keyboard. The analogue sounds are programmed by a set of control knobs and switches built into the lyricon synth unit, which doubled as an instrument case. The other lyricon I played was technically known as the Driver: it could be blown the same way, but could 'drive' another pitch-to-voltage analogue synthesizer, such as my Roland ProMars, which is what I played on 'Einstein a Go-Go' (on *Landscape* 1981).

I wanted to develop my own sound, to do something new with a new instrument, to transcend my limitations as a performing musician, using the MC8 computer (on tracks like 'Shake the West Awake' (*Landscape* 1981)), as well as the wind synths.

**RL:** *I'm assuming your drums, Richard, were early electronic drums? You helped design, develop and road test some of them yourself, yes? Was your drum synthesizer simply treating and changing the drum sounds, or could you trigger samples or different sounds?*

**RJB:** The long hours on the road stimulated many great conversations about this, that, and everything. Since everyone in the band was composing and arranging by that time and in keeping with our striving for originality, we were looking for new sounds and bigger sounds to get us out of the drums, bass, guitar, Fender Rhodes sound that was prevalent in the 70s before punk hit. The great arrangers and composers combine instruments in original ways to create new timbres but as a five piece there are only so many combinations and so we chose to change the basic timbres that we were creating. Part of this was thinking about why drums were still in the stone age. We had electric guitars, bass, and pianos. We could even electrify the horns, but drums were still basically skins stretched over hollow logs. I had experimented with electric drums (I still have those prototypes) but it made more sense to leap over that phase and go straight to electronic drums/percussion. I had experimented for years with my EMS Synthi A and I auditioned every electronic percussion device that was available and wrote articles for *Melody Maker* and *Sound International* about them. They were not what I was looking for. On stage, I was triggering electronics from my acoustic drums using crystal microphones from rotary dial telephone mouthpieces as triggers but I always wanted a pure electronic drum that had no acoustic element to it. John introduced me to Dave Simmons (who was at MusicAid, the UK distributor for the Lyricon). Dave had built the SDSIII synthesizer that was very similar to Syndrums – like a sound effect but not very drum-like. I showed Dave my ideas for creating a truly drum-like electronic sound and that was what became the SDSV drum synth with the hexagonal pads. We mocked up the sounds on Dave's ARP2600 and then he built the electronics modules to emulate that. Because I was playing live so much, I wanted presets (the four buttons on the front) so that I could change sounds quickly during a gig. The ability to make the pitch descend came from the way I tuned my Pearl concert toms (with one tension rod loose).

**RL:** *Pretty soon after the Landscape album (1979) was released, 'European Man' (Landscape 1980) came out, a dance single, and Landscape disappeared from the live scene. Next time we saw the band you were all dressed up in vinyl clothing with new hairdos, some sci-fi looking instruments, and were arsing around in pop videos! How did that come about? Were you pushed by the record company or was it a conscious decision to aim for fame & fortune? And what about the choice to add vocals to the music?*

**JLW:** The new clothes and haircuts stem from 1979. The record company had little input. We realised that to make some impact – to survive – we had to re-think every aspect of what Landscape did as a band. Material, sound, look, studio practice, mixing, artwork, promotion. Richard's insights into the Blitz scene (initially via Rusty) gave us a ringside view of the future. Most of the record companies had no idea what was going on.

With regard to 'arsing around', we were always a 'truth to materials' kind of band. Each composition created its own world and we responded to that in the way we played it, introduced it on stage and recorded it, whether that's the punky drive of 'U2XME'

(Landscape 1977), the super-smooth groove of 'Too Many Questions' (on Landscape 1980) or the electrojazz jigsaw of 'The Mechanical Bride' (on Landscape 1980). The nature of 'Einstein a Go-Go' (on Landscape 1981) as a song, together with its subject matter (nuclear terrorism) demanded a dark and funny video, so we took the whole thing seriously and did our best (along with director Brian Grant and his crew) to make something that would work.

**RJB:** John summed it up very well. We were following our musical instincts and the vibe we were getting from our audiences. The London music scene at that time was a relatively small, tight knit community. Rusty was a longtime friend of mine – I had given him some drum lessons when I was playing with his parents' band, and we stayed friends. He came out to see us live and he was using our music at the Blitz. I always say that that whole electronic music scene that emerged out of the Blitz was something that Rusty cobbled together from the various, mostly European (including the UK at that time) artists that were dabbling in synthetic sound production. Electronic music was happening in isolated pockets and in different cities and countries, but he pulled it all together, curated it and turned it into a movement – a phenomenon.

**RL:** *So were you ahead of the New Romantics, an early synthpop band, or precursors to IDM, EDM or Darkwave?*

**JLW:** Yes, all of the above. (Though I have no idea what IDM is.) [2.]

**RJB:** The Blitz was really the cauldron that turned those disparate ingredients into a brew. There were synthpop elements happening (M with 'Pop Muzik' (M 1979) and The Buggles) but we played on those records too. Trevor Horn used to come to our gigs at the White Swan in Hammersmith when he was playing at the Hammersmith Palais. There was a lot of intermingling and cross fertilization in London at the time that turned seemingly different kinds of artists into a scene. It was a very exciting time. I had felt like they slammed the proverbial door shut on the swinging sixties the day before I landed in Southampton in 1972, coming back from NZ. When I walked into the Blitz, I realized that a similar kind of energy was building up and I knew I had to be part of it. I was always fascinated by creative movements that break out in big cities like Paris in the forties and New York City in the late fifties and early sixties, London in the sixties, and suddenly I found myself sitting on top of one that we were a part of.

**RL:** *Where did you see yourselves at that time?*

**JLW:** Bill Kimber at RCA actually suggested we put Electronic Dance Music on the cover and give it the catalogue number EDM1. And Richard coined the term 'New Romantic' as a vivid way of explaining what was happening among all these highly creative post-punk (and punk-weary) people who were clubbing at Billy's and Blitz. It was a ground-up movement; it took the music press quite a while to get it.

**RJB:** I always felt that it was important to be part of a movement. If you are doing something totally unique, you are an anomaly. You see in the visual arts. Most famous artists fall into a movement and sometimes start or belong to various movements throughout their careers. As much as we strove for extreme originality and fought

against conformity, we knew we had to be seen to belong to some kind of movement or genre to survive as a viable entity.

**RL:** *Around the same time, both of you became involved in production and programming. Tell me about working with Kate Bush on Never For Ever (Bush 1980)? I assume you were programming the Fairlight for her? (Although Discogs notes that 'Richard James Burgess and John Walters appear courtesy of RCA Records' you aren't actually credited with anything specific!)*

**JLW:** It's fairly well documented (on the album sleeve, CD notes and elsewhere) that Richard and I programmed Fairlight CMI on *Never for Ever* (Bush 1980). 'Babushka', 'Delius', 'All We Ever Look For' and 'Army Dreamers' all use Fairlight samples that we created, adapted and played, most of them in Abbey Road with Kate and her brilliant co-producer Jon Kelly. (For some of her ideas we persuaded her that it was still better and easier to use tape than a Fairlight sample, because at that time the CMI's capacity was very limited.) But it was great for short evocative sounds such as the sound of Kate's brother John cocking a rifle on 'Army Dreamers' and the (genuine) broken glass on 'Babushka'. We made a hell of a mess. Working on *Never for Ever* was an inspiring experience that gave us extra courage to make the *Tea-Rooms* album (Landscape 1981) as uncompromising as it ended up. We pinned up a slogan at the back of Jam (the mixing studio) saying 'No Middle Ground'!

**RJB:** Kate was a true inspiration. I had known Jon Kelly for many years having met him when he first started at Air Studios – he is an amazing engineer. The thing that set Kate apart from most artists I had worked with was how open to new ideas she was. At the same time, she was very sure footed in terms of what she was trying to achieve. Many producers I worked with seemed like they were stabbing in the dark. Kate had a vision that she was reaching for but she wasn't using conventional means to achieve that vision. That very much aligned with the way John and I approached making records. That was her first number one album I believe, yet it's pretty out there musically speaking. Not only that but there were very few women producers making records at that time. She was a ground breaker.

**RL:** *Richard, you turn up as arranger and contributor of 'Effects' on Shock's 'Angel Face' single (Shock 1980) as well as co-producer and co-writer of 'R.E.R.B', the B-side, with Rusty Egan. I saw Shock live several times, and some of them were also part of Bev Sage and Steve Fairnie' Casualtease project (The Techno Orchestra 1982).*

**RJB:** The credits are all messed up on that single. The truth is that Rusty and I produced the record and John Hudson engineered it. I programmed or played every note on all those Shock tracks and Rusty was integrally involved in the way those records sound and how they came about. Rusty brought Shock to me and the idea of covering 'Angel Face'. He came round to my place in Camberwell, and I programmed the track on the MC-8 and my synth rigs. There were a lot of System 100M sounds on that record if I recall. I modified the ADSRs on my 100Ms to be 10x faster than the stock 100Ms so the bass sounds on the 1/16 note sequencer pattern were very staccato and impactful – like a cross between a bass sound and a kick drum, which I loved.

Shock blew my mind every time I saw them live. That was another element to the London scene at that time – the theatrical/dance/hedonistic performance art. 'R.E.R.B.' was a last-minute, hurried production for a B-side to 'Angel Face'. John Hudson engineered the sessions and his wife, Kate, played the mix of 'Angel Face' for RCA – they immediately wanted to rush it out, so we had to produce a B-side in very short order. The basic composition and programming took about ten minutes with Rusty and I in my home studio in Camberwell. I took the MC-8 and my synth rig into Mayfair Studios in South Molton St. and dumped all the parts to 24-track tape, then I overdubbed the repeat echo piano parts live in the studio. The track is a twelve-bar blues because I didn't have time to think about writing anything more sophisticated. We had no idea it would turn into a club classic when we were cutting it. Shock should have been much bigger than they were, and Rusty and I should have received the credit for producing the records. If you don't mind your business with eagle eyes, someone else will mind it for you.

**JLW:** Shock actually toured the UK performing a routine in which they mimed to 'Einstein a Go-Go', and thereby did us a huge favour, because lots of kids got to hear that track. A couple of people I met who heard them assumed Shock and Landscape were the same group and asked me which of the two robots I was! I knew the Techno Twins, too, and co-wrote several songs with their colleague Nick Battle. By the way Shock's Tim Dry (aka Tik) was an enormous help as a movement coach for my performance in the 'Einstein' video. I played and programmed on several more Shock tracks that Richard produced, including 'Dynamo Beat'.

**RL:** *How did you end up being such a part of the New Romantic scene, even if that was sometimes behind the scenes? I know you worked with Spandau Ballet on 'To Cut a Long Story Short' (1980) and their Journeys to Glory album (1981). What made a good pop single back in the day? What magic could you sprinkle on the music?*

**RJB:** It came about because of the Blitz and my longstanding friendship with DJ Rusty Egan. I became good friends with several people at the Blitz from being there every week. Mostly I had no idea what any of them did outside of the club and then one night Spandau Ballet got up and played and I realized I had been talking to them for months at the bar. Gary Kemp had asked to hear what I was working on, and I took him out to my car and played him a cassette tape of the rough mixes for the *Tearooms* album. A short while later, I got a call from Steve Dagger asking if I would be interested in producing their first album. I had no official productions under my belt and there were several already successful producers who wanted to produce the record but Chrysalis OKed me for the gig and that's what happened. By that time, I had seen almost every show they had played (about six private events, if I recall) and I had an extremely clear vision of what the record should sound like. I knew it needed to be quintessentially Blitz sounding but they weren't an electronic group per se. I made notes about the sounds I wanted, and it was all sonically constructed in my head before we recorded the album. I didn't want to overproduce the record and looking back, I stuck really close to my original vision for the sound and functionality of that early phase of the band. It very quickly established them as a new musical movement and influenced many records by other artists to follow. Clearly, Spandau went in a different direction for their third album, but by then the UK music scene had moved on and become much more pop oriented. I remain friends with the members of Spandau Ballet to this day.

**RL:** *By the time the Manhattan Boogie-Woogie album (Landscape 1982) comes out, it felt like the band were a bit behind the times rather than ahead of the curve. Was it because the band were focused on other projects, or do you think it had just run its course?*

**JLW:** *MB-W holds up well as an album, though it didn't have another 'Einstein' on it. We were writing more co-operatively, which yielded some satisfying results, especially 'Bad Times' and 'The Long Way Home'. There's a weird, dark mood to that album, but it also has some monster grooves, which Andy's instrumental mixes on *Landscape A Go-Go* CD3 (Landscape 2023) have brought out well.*

However, it was difficult to hold it all together financially in 1982, which meant that we pretty much had to do outside projects, and we spent less time together as a band. The record company made some bad decisions on our behalf, we started to break up with our management and I guess the DIY spirit that had held the five of us together for so long temporarily departed us. Lots of things didn't happen the way we'd hoped.

**RJB:** We had lost the support of RCA by then. Major record labels move on very quickly. The one big factor that triggered the beginning of the end was when RCA failed to clear the video for 'Norman Bates' with the Musicians' Union. The marketing department of the label had placed the video on eleven different TV shows scheduled for the week of release. Pamela Stephenson was playing the lead role in the video and the direction of the video was a masterful piece of work and a labour of love by director Brian Grant. The union banned the video and would not let any of the plays happen even though we begged them as longtime members of the union.

Subsequently, 'Norman Bates' topped out at around #40 on the UK charts and we never recovered from that. I was shattered. We knew that Norman Bates was a weird record. It wasn't my pick for a second single – RCA insisted on it – but if those video performances had been broadcast, I believe the *Tearooms* album would have gone to #1 and we would have gone on to have more hits from that album. Remember, that it was not the fragmented media world of today, these TV shows had tens of millions of viewers all over the country.

A second factor was, that once we stopped playing live, we were one hundred percent reliant on the label. We stopped touring because we hadn't figured out how to reproduce what we had achieved on the *Tea-Rooms* album using computer technology because the equipment was not remotely roadworthy at that time. We were a few years too early to fully capitalize on what we had created.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed making the *Manhattan Boogie-Woogie* album and I do think there is some great material on it, but everything is relative to the time and once you lose the enthusiasm of your label it's 'thank you and goodnight'. Regarding whether that album was behind the times or not I would note that we were never really with the times at any point in our career. We steadfastly charted our own course, refused to follow trends, and rejected any musical direction that sounded like anyone else, and it just happened that the 'times' crossed paths with us for that brief moment in the early eighties. We were almost commercially suicidal in the sense that we didn't try to fit in

or be commercially viable. Even 'Einstein A Go-Go' was not obvious musically or lyrically. It wasn't considered 'commercial' until it was a giant hit.

**RL:** *So the five-piece Landscape break up, although you two stay with bass player Andy Pask as the short lived band Landscape III. RCA also stick with you for two singles (Landscape II, 1983a, 1983b) and then the name is no longer in use. Can I ask about that brief period of time and that incarnation of the band? Was it hard to walk away from that moniker?*

**JLW:** In retrospect, breaking up the band was a serious mistake. But we had a highly creative and productive time in the studio with Landscape III. We even made a video for 'So Good, So Pure, So Kind', directed by Mike Brady, which features the great Ruby Turner and Barbie Wilde (from Shock). Those tracks sound ahead of their time, but in retrospect I wish we'd carried on working together as a five-piece. Very little happened with those tracks after their release, and '(I'd Love to) Fly Away' remained unreleased until last year. There was a change of leadership at the record company, and we lost our support there. With the re-released tracks on the box set we've amended the publishing credits so that Chris and Peter share any royalties that come our way for the Landscape III tracks.

**RJB:** It was a mistake for us to break up the five piece but my recollection is that we were feeling musically lost. The UK music scene is fast moving and was changing rapidly at that time. The second and third generation New Romantic bands were in the charts. Landscape III went back to a more organic sound with live performance – in some ways influenced by the input from the US label. The US still hadn't caught up to the UK and Europe with the New Romantic sound or the heavy electronic music that we were known for. The US label wanted us to add guitars. It felt like there was nowhere to go. To our dismay, RCA pulled the promotion from 'So Good, So Pure, So Kind' when it was leaping up the lower end of charts and getting airplay and reviews.

**JLW:** We released a follow-up, 'You Know How To Hurt Me' (May 1983). There were photo sessions and great picture sleeves (John Warwicker again) and we had 'Fly Away' in the can, so someone in the company must have believed in us.

**RJB:** But the new boss didn't like us, and more or less said so. We had our lawyer release us from the deal and that was the end of that. In retrospect, I feel that once we lost our almost daily connection with our live fanbase from touring, it felt like we were playing 'pin the tail on the donkey', musically speaking. Since we were such a weird band – musically and in every other way – being able to get that direct feedback from the audience was critical and kept us independent of radio and the whole major label machine. Industry gatekeepers never really understood what we were doing other than being able to see the effect we were having on our followers, who were very loyal and enthusiastic. People today say that our industry is all about the data – I believe the music industry has always been about the data but, back then, you had to get past the gatekeepers to generate the data. Our, mostly self-produced, DIY live gigs circumvented that process and gave us a direct line to a group of fans that loved what we did.

**RL:** *Since then, you've both had pretty busy careers. Richard, you continued as a producer and performer on many albums, and then used your experiences to write your books The Art of Record Production (Burgess 1997), which became The Art of Music Production: The Theory and Practice for later editions, and The History of Music Production (Burgess 2014). What is it about production that you love so much? How does it compare with the energy and presence of live music, or should recorded music be very different, as it so often is?*

**RJB:** I have always had one foot in the studio and the other on the stage and they are completely different experiences that require a different approach. I love the spontaneity of playing live music, especially with Landscape because we were an improvisational band of composers. Sounds like a contradiction in terms but we were all composers and arrangers, and improvisation is really spontaneous composition, often based on a specific set of predetermined parameters. Recorded music is about perfecting the composition and the arrangement.

A score is a representation of a composition, but a recording is the full realization of that composition with not just the pitch and the timings of the notes but the timbres, relative levels, and the fine interplay and blend between the various instruments and parts. The buzz of a great live gig is truly amazing but transient. The buzz of nailing a production is deeply satisfying and the result is there for all time. A score can be reinterpreted, and it can be hard to know exactly what the composer and arranger intended from reading a score, but a recording is exactly what the producer intended. I felt the same way as a musician too, which is why I liked being a session musician so much and recording in general. Some people really like the ephemerality of playing live but to capture a composition, arrangement complete with the performance parameters for all time and to be able to listen back to it years later is very special to me, which is why I recorded all the live landscape gigs.

**RL** *You were formerly Associate Director for Business Strategies at The Smithsonian Institution, and have written about their music collection for academic and popular journals.*

*Some of your interests in addition to production and technology include ethnographic music, drumming (of course!) and the somewhat contentious issue of intellectual property. Can you tell us about some of that, including your doctorate? And now you are the CEO of A2IM.*

*Do you miss the recording studio and performing live?*

**RJB:** I went to work at Smithsonian Folkways recordings because they had such an amazing collection of recordings that influenced me to go into the music business. Specifically, the Lead Belly recordings. I bought one of the original Folkways' Lead Belly LPs when I was a very young teenager and prior to that I had been heavily influenced by Lonnie Donegan, who covered many of Lead Belly's songs. There was something about the power of that period of Black American roots music that really spoke to me – even when it was heavily diluted by someone like Lonnie Donegan.

In terms of production, I feel very lucky that I was working during a golden age of recording studios and the music industry. That period has passed, and studios, production, engineering, and distribution are not arcane or difficult to access anymore, primarily because of the democratizing effect of technology and the economics of today's recorded music industry. I have spent my life trying to figure out how things work, and that side of the business is not a mystery to me anymore, so I moved on to try to understand other secrets.

Intellectual property is the reason why artists of all disciplines can make a living from their art. It's fundamental to professional creators. I like what the US Constitution says about copyright: 'The Congress shall have Power [...] To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.' Unfortunately, the recorded music industry was fat and happy at the end of the 1990s, charging \$20 for a CD with two good tracks on it and showing zero interest in moving to digital distribution at the time when it should have. MP3s were invented in 1988, the first three MP3 players came out in 1997. A few independent labels experimented with digital distribution at that time, but the majors didn't make any meaningful moves into digital. Napster happened and disrupted the industry. The majors could have bought and monetized Napster for four or five million dollars, but instead they tried to sue it out of existence and then sue grandmothers and young music fans instead of embracing the new technology. Then the industry still did nothing until Apple started iTunes in 1982.

Consequently, the recorded music industry lost control of its distribution and its pricing. Both of which negatively affect every recording musician and songwriter to this day, because the pricing incentives are misaligned. Music is now a loss leader for other products, which explains why recorded music is so cheap relative to other entertainment IP. This failure to move with the times and technological advancements has been immeasurably damaging for artists and songwriters and our cultural heritage. I took the job as President and CEO of A2IM in the hope that I could have some influence over the next phase of recorded music and try to bring it back to a value proposition that works for artists and songwriters. There are hit songwriters who are having to work two and three jobs to piece together a living. I believe that to create the highest quality music we need our musicians, artists, and writers to be able to make a living from creating. That's why the US constitution indicates the importance of creators being able to make money from their creations and continue creating. My Ph.D. dissertation was called 'Structural Change in the Music Industry: The Evolving Role of the Musician', and it makes the case for musicians being able to make a living from playing or writing or whatever they do so that they can fully develop their skills and so that we can get the most sophisticated music from them.

**RL:** *John, after Landscape you also worked as a producer and co-founded the electronic jazz orchestra Zyklus, But in 1992 you co-founded the quirky audio journal Unknown Public, and the SoundCircus record label, and since later in the 1990s you have written about music and graphic design for a number of newspapers and magazines. You became the editor of Eye magazine in 1999 and its co-owner in 2008.*

*You've also been involved in academia, with external examining and guest lectures. (In fact you recently asked me if I'd seen your lecture for the Design department at Falmouth University; which I hadn't.)*

*Tell me about those activities: Do design and music share anything concept- or design-wise? How important is design to the business of music? And how do you feel about your pop star past? Or even your infamous jazz one?*

**JLW:** What I learned as a bandleader, composer and then co-operative musician in Landscape in the years 1974-83 have informed everything I've done since then, whether as a composer, arranger, producer, journalist or as an editor/author. I had a hit with Swans Way's 'Soul Train' (Swans Way 1984), which I produced and arranged, and worked with a number of artists, including Kissing The Pink, Twelfth Night and Mark Springer. I worked with Richard on his solo album for Capitol in New York, *Richard James Burgess* (Burgess 1984), co-writing most of the material. That deserves to be re-released some time.

But by 1989, having made possibly the best album I've ever produced (a jazz album called *Big Music* by the Mike Gibbs Orchestra (1988)), I was broke. I retrained as a journalist. That meant some draining, sometimes humiliating experiences to get to the stage where I could keep going and support my family. By the mid-1990s I had another career, and writing and editing has consumed my life since then.

Zyklus, very part-time, was a continuation of some of the things I'd done with Landscape, combining pre-programmed electronic parts live alongside jazz musician Ian Carr, a really inspiring musician, and I had the pleasure of working closely with my friend and mentor Neil Ardley, with whom I had studied composition while still a teenager.

The audio journal *Unknown Public*, co-founded with music manager Laurence Aston, combined my interest in left-field music with my new-found journalism skills. That was a great experience, working with some outstanding musicians, and designer John Warwick (Tomato), who I've known for decades. (John designed for Landscape while he was a student, and he did a terrific job designing *Landscape A Go-Go*.)

*Unknown Public* led to co-founding SoundCircus with Joanna MacGregor and several other spin-off projects. I wrote newspaper columns about new music (first at the *Independent*, then the *Guardian*) and in 1999 I was appointed editor of *Eye*, having previously been managing editor. So *Eye* has been my main band for 25 years now. One of the first articles I commissioned for my debut issue (*Eye* 33) as editor was 'Punk uncovered: an unofficial history of provincial opposition' (Bestley and Noble 1999) was co-written by Russell Bestley, editor of this very journal. I also edit *Pulp* (in five languages) for Fedrigoni Paper, and I've written two design books: *Fifty Typefaces that Changed the World* (Waters 2013) and the biography *Alan Kitching: A Life in Letterpress* (Waters 2016). [3.]

I am not an academic, although I do commission design academics to write for *Eye*. Richard is genuine academic – he's Dr Burgess now.

**RL:** *Let's finish where we began. Is the Landscape box nostalgia or a kind of cleaning up, a full stop or a sign announcing THE END? Or should we expect a full band reunion and international tour? (And if so, please can I be on the guest list?)*

**JLW:** There is still quite a bit to explore, either in remixing and enhancing what we've already released or excavating tunes and performances from the archive: reviving the unreleased track 'When The Chips Are Down' (on Landscape 2023) gave us a taste for that. In recent months I've enjoyed writing and re-writing some tunes and swapping them with the others for discussion. We're not sure where that might go yet. Regarding live performance, I'd prefer to let some avatars strut their stuff on my behalf! (Abba seem to have adopted our old black vinyl outfits with primary colour trim.)

**RJB:** I would really like to see everything we did, from the inception of the first John Walters Band through to Landscape III, see the light of day. I love what we did with the *Landscape A Go-Go* box set and it was so much fun working together again. We still have live recordings that we didn't release, and I would like to see the best of those released as well as the *Thursday the 12<sup>th</sup>* album. [4.] As John said, we are interested in remixing some of our material as well. Then we have the scores of the music we wrote back then that we never recorded, and I think we could record those pieces as well as writing and recording some completely new music. I would not be averse to playing live again if everyone wanted to do it, but we would have to all be aligned for that to happen.

Thanks so much for some wonderful probing questions.

**RL:** *Thanks again for your time, as well as the music.*

## NOTES

1. The introduction to this interview includes material that appeared as a review of *Landscape A Go-Go* in *International Times* (Loydell 2023)

<https://internationaltimes.it/the-art-of-landscape/>

See also <https://landscape.band/about/landscape-a-go-go-media> and

<https://landscape.band/about>

2. 'Intelligent dance music (IDM) is a style of electronic music originating in the early 1990s, defined by idiosyncratic experimentation rather than specific genre constraints.' *Wikipedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligent\\_dance\\_music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligent_dance_music) (accessed 18 June 2024).

3. 'Italian paper manufacturer Fedrigoni has published *Pulp* magazine since 2014, showcasing creative work produced using its papers. It is distributed free to Fedrigoni's customers, and is also available to buy online.' (Leslie 2022) *Pulp's* website is at <https://pulp.fedrigoni.com/> (accessed 18 June 2024).

4. 'Landscape's first album was *Thursday the 12th* (Landscape 1975), a mono, cassette-only release on the Jaguar label founded by British jazz pianist Gordon Beck [...] This album was made with the eight-piece version of Landscape that John [Walters] formed after disbanding the John Walters Nonet in the summer of 1974.'

<https://landscape.band/discography/thursday-the-12th> (accessed 18 June 2024)

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