

# MARK TUCKER



## Paul Brett presents an insight into MARK TUCKER -

Musician/Producer/Sound Engineer  
Mark's professional career in the music business began as a musician in the early 1980s. His first recording contract was with Columbia Records in Los Angeles. This was where he recorded his first album with David Kahne, Tchad Blake and Mitchell Froom. As a result of this experience, some years later Mark developed a deeper interest within music recording and production.

Prior to this, Mark had spent almost ten years working hard as a musician, touring throughout the UK with his bands with the signing to Columbia Records in LA being the high point. As a result of involvement in many studio recordings, Mark's interest in recording and production later led to his managing two UK residential recording studios; Presshouse Studios in Devon and Woodworm Studios in Oxfordshire. Presshouse was owned by Jethro Tull's guitar player Martin Barre. "The first time I met Martin was at a charity gig" recalls Mark. "We asked him to join us on stage for few numbers and I remember doing 'Johnny B Goode' and showing Martin the guitar part in

his car before the gig. As if Martin Barre did not know how to play Johnny B Goode!... He took it well, just smiling and nodding agreeably; that's Martin, he's a lovely man. We just hit it off and I ended up (together with my father) designing and building Presshouse Studio for him. I spent the next twenty six years of my life working for Martin and had a superb time in the process. I met some amazing people working for Jethro Tull and Fairport Convention and became spoilt working with musicians of their calibre." Throughout this period working with Martin, Mark and he formed a band called 'The Summer Band'. The band was initially formed to have some fun and when Martin came back

from his tours with Tull, it allowed him to play music he enjoyed personally outside of the band. The Summer Band later became more serious and viable. Martin was invited along with Mark, to join Fairport Convention on stage at Cropredy in 1987.

"At Cropredy (1987), Martin played a couple of pieces by Bach. We had all this complex dual guitar harmony stuff worked out. For me at least, it was quite difficult to play. I had played to big audiences before in America many times, but to walk out in front of an 18,000 crowd with Ian Anderson, Richard Thomson, Gerry Donahue and all these other great musicians standing on the stage right next to me was awesome. The band later changed its name to The Martin Barre Band, performing again at the Cropredy Festival in 1993. The band continued touring Britain and Germany and last toured in 2005" recalls Mark.

It was working in both Presshouse and Woodworm studios that led to Mark's subsequent involvement in other recordings as engineer, producer and as a musician with many other artists including: Jethro Tull, Fairport Convention and many others including of course Martin Barre. Presshouse and later Woodworm studios attracted, many internation-

al artists including: Robert Plant, Steve Tilston, Steve Gibbons, Ian Gillan, Kirsty Hawkshaw, Engerica, Sam Brown, PJ Harvey, Portishead, Beth Gibbons, Ralph McTell, Spirit of the West and Billy Connolly to name but a few.

In particular, Mark highlights an experience recording a certain well known Scottish comedian and musician, "Recording Billy Connolly was interesting. He is very shy in the recording studio and had this habit of moving away from the microphone. I would keep moving the microphone to him, so in the end Billy was pushed right into the corner! For a man with such confidence on stage as a comedian, he was very timid in the studio".

Other projects Mark has been involved with include: Alan Simon's 'Excalibur 1 and 2'. The Excalibur albums features an incredible array of guests including; Roger Hodgson, Allan Parsons, The Prague Symphony Orchestra, Jon Anderson, Justin Hayward, John Wetton (King Crimson), Maddy Prior, and Andreas Vollenweider. Steve Knightley's 'Cruel River' & most recently; 'Track Of Words Retraced', Three Daft Monkeys 'Social Vertigo', Tiny Tin Ladies 'Rediculousbohemia'.

Marks latest personal release in 2008 is 'Swans In Flight' which Mark co-wrote with his business partner Hugo Montgomery Swan. Mark also engineered, produced and performed extensively on this album which features guest appearances from: James LoMenzo (Black Label Society/Megadeth), Martin Barre (Jethro Tull), Steve Stevens (Billy Idol), Robin Guy (Bruce Dickinson, GMT, Faith No More), Marco Mendoza (Thin Lizzy/Whitesnake), Kip Winger (Alice Cooper/Winger), Phil Johnston (The Robert Plant Band), Ken Nicol (Steeleye Span)



and Ric Sanders. (**Fairport Convention**). The album was conceived by Hugo, suggesting it would be a challenge to produce a rock album using only acoustic guitars. Mark says, "We



Ellenside Paperboys with Mark Tucker



Mark at Woodworm Studios

approached the acoustic guitar manufacturers to see if they would be into the idea, and they were. I took receipt of about twenty guitars all new, ranging from £150 to £3,500, some good, and some not so good... I then had to work out which guitars would be best for the songs we had available. I like a challenge but there are limits. It was probably one of the most challenging albums I have made, not just because we used guest musicians from all over the world, but one was never quite sure where the musical contributions would take the given tracks. After-all, we needed to maintain some continuity with the album and hopefully make it sound fresh as if the musicians played together. I would like to think we achieved that."

In 2000 Mark built his own private recording studio; formerly Ibiza, and now The Green Room where he currently enjoys producing both music and films.

"I particularly enjoy working closely with singer songwriters and musicians; I'm not keen on sitting nursing the computer. They are amazing pieces of technology, but you can't beat two or more people interacting. Having started out working with Tull and Fairport they set a pretty

high standard, so I've learnt to expect good musicianship." states Mark. Other collaborative artists Mark has worked with include; David Hughes (last four albums), Nigel Stonier, Anna Ryder, Vikki Clayton, Flook (best group BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards 2006; 'Rubai' & 'Haven'), an excellent young Danish band called Kasir & English singer songwriter Dan Crisp.

"I have an aversion to working in solitude. Occasionally I have to, but I always choose to work in a collaborative way. For me the best music is made that way. It's quite amazing that when I look back at over thirty years in the music business, other than two bad experiences with severely over inflated egos, all the people I have worked with are really amazing; lovely people. Often there is call for some contribution to a track and as a result, I appear playing guitar and other instruments such as bass, keyboards or percussion or whatever. Having worked on many folk and folk-rock records, I became known for that genre. I'm very proud of a lot of that work, but I also enjoy working with just about any kind of music, providing it's good and played with passion and love."

Woodworm Studios was bought by Steve and Rachael Hill in 2004, Mark however still uses Woodworm as his first choice residential studio. "Woodworm's is a lovely studio, much like Presshouse was, which was also sold in 2004. It has a beautiful live room, both 2" tape and digital mediums. Steve has done a great job of upgrading the studio, installing a lovely Audient desk, loads of quality equipment. It really is perfect for recording a group of musicians live" Mark observes enthusiastically.

Since 2004 Mark has developed his personal and combined life-long interest in boating, photography and film making, albeit in the marine world. In August 2007 in a nine meter Rib, Mark circumnavigated the Irish Sea to Ireland, exploring some 1000 miles of the South West Irish coast including the breathtaking Skellig and Blasket Isles. A similar trip was conducted in September 2007 on Lewis in the Hebrides, where he and a team from RIB International Magazine explored this part of the Western Coast of Scotland, again with Mark filming and photographing the trip.

"I used to enjoy the sea as a child. Playing boats was always a part of my youth. Having spent many years in the clinical and controlling environment that is a recording studio, I wanted to experience something a little more unpredictable. Filming and photographing at sea in RIB is both challenging and exciting, you never know what is going to happen next."

Mark continues to work with Hugo Montgomery-Swan with their company Oyster House Music and in conclusion, states his hopes for the future.

"We originally set up Oyster House Music to promote the release of 'Swans In Flight', but we saw that with all of our available resources, including our combined skills and knowledge, we could offer other worthy artists benefits also. As a result we are currently working closely with USA artistes Marco Mendoza and TM Stevens promoting gigs, including a UK tour with Swans In Flight, TM Stevens and Marco Mendoza as a three artist show with the Swans as the band for all three acts. It's all very exciting!"

