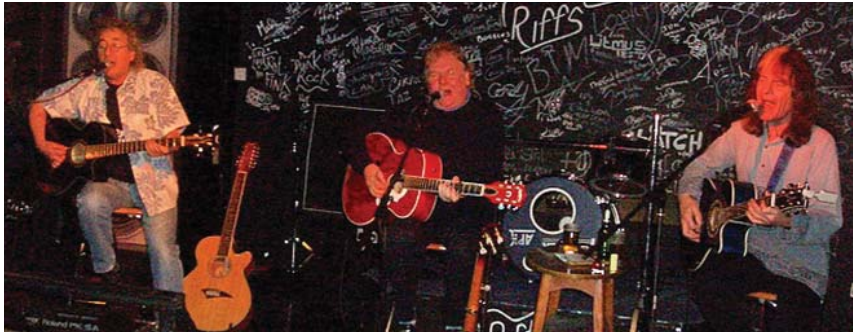


LIFE AFTER THE STRAWBS

by Paul Brett



Current lineup....Acoustic Strawbs

I've played with many bands in the past, either as a member or recording on various sessions. In my earlier years, I had quite a close association with The Strawbs and various members of the line up over the years. I played lead electric guitar on Dave Cousins epic "The Lady of the Lake" which is on their Dragonfly LP, soon to be released on CD. Apart from working with Richard Hudson and John Ford in Elmer Gantry's Velvet Opera, then Velvet Opera when Elmer left and John Joyce joined. I worked with Dave Lambert in Fire on the Magic Shoemaker concept LP, which is now a top vinyl collectible. John and I also toured with the Acoustic Strawbs and I've worked for Dave Cousins doing various Radio programmes for him when he was a radio Producer.



Hudson and Ford, alongside Dave Lambert, formed the backbone of the electric Strawbs for many years and were with the band throughout their most successful period. Yet another extremely fine guitarist, Brian Willoughby also dedicated many years playing



Dave Lambert

with the band and it is Brian I want to mainly document in this article. Throughout his formative career, Brian played with Mary Hopkin, Roger Whittaker, Joe Brown, Jim Diamond and believe it or not, Monty Python. However it was with The Strawbs that he dedicated 25 years of his life working with.

Brian has always been a sensitive player, playing subtle phrases, rather than more aggressive styles and in this, he seemed to compliment Dave Lambert's style very well. I booked The Strawbs for the Pwllheli Music & Arts Festival a few years ago and they came up as the Acoustic Trio, with Brian Dave L and Dave

Cousins. They played a great set and were well appreciated by a mainly Welsh speaking audience, which is not an easy audience to get a response from. It was during this time that Brian told me he was quitting the band in order to play with an American singer whom he had formed a relationship with. Her name was Cathryn Craig. Cathryn was herself, a fairly established artiste in her own right, having sung with the legendary Righteous Brothers, Shel Silverstein, Jorma Kaukonen and Bobby Bare in the States. It must have been difficult from Brian in many ways to take the decision to leave a World name band that he had been with for many years, but leave he did not long after our conversation.



For the past few years now, Brian and Cathryn have been building a very solid reputation, touring clubs and venues across the UK. Their CD's have received excellent reviews from many top publications. Mojo wrote of Cathryn's Porch Songs CD "an intimate and compelling slice of real country blues". Music Scene wrote of their "I Will" CD "all encompassing masterpiece... a must for anyone interested in American Roots music".



Guitarist wrote of Brian's solo CD Fingers Crossed "On this impeccably crafted album, Willoughby moves seamlessly through just about the whole gamut of acoustic styles". Apart from their solo and joint musical collaborations, the couple have worked with International Folk Star Nanci Griffith. They have been busy writing songs for Charities. They wrote "Alice's Song" which was recorded by the Strawbs as a single for the National Autistic Society's "Year of Awareness" plus the song "Rumours of Rain" in aid of children who are

victims of war. The performed this song with pupils of the Askam Primary School, accompanied by members of Steeleye Span, Lindisfarne, Fairport Convention and Pentangle. Indeed a star studied line up. see Brian and Cathryn's website for more details <http://www.craigand-willoughby.com/>

Both Brian and I, like many other guitarists, relied on Johnny Joyce to set up our guitars. Sadly, after John's death, that reliance is no longer available to any of us. Brian once told me that he would have loved to have played with Lonnie Donegan as he was a great admirer of Lon's work. I did have the privilege of playing with Lon in the early 1970's and it certainly was an unforgettable experience. Whilst I was writing this article, I had a call from a journalist in the States from The Deal, a large and vastly circulated magazine in the States, dealing mainly with Financial Issues. Matt Miller, the Chief Features writer was calling to ask for my appraisal of the Vintage Guitar sales in Europe. After the interview, he mentioned his son was a great fan of Rick Wakeman, also a former Strawb. He said he was currently playing in a band with Jon Anderson of Yes, touring the States. It suddenly dawned on me that ex Strawbs bassist, John Ford was living in Long Island, so I put the two in touch to see if there was any common ground to explore. Richard Hudson's apres Strawb life encompassed playing drums with many different London based bands. I've always thought that Hud was one of the best rock drummer around. He used to put on a great stage act in Elmer Gantry's Velvet Opera.

The main thing is will all of these excellent musicians, is that they have stayed the course and adapted their styles and attitudes through the years and are still very much in the forefront of playing. The Strawbs constantly Tour the Globe, sometimes with the Acoustic Line up, now featuring Dave Lambert. Dave Cousins and Chas Cronk and other times with a full electric line up with Rod Coombes and John Hawken on drums and keyboards respectively. Rod played on my Interlife LP. John and Hud stay in touch as they have always been close friends as well as musical allies. Dave Lambert just re-formed Fire for a series of live dates performing his Magic Shoemaker concept. Bass player and Drummer were Paul Brett Sage members, Bob Voice and Dick Duffall who were in the original Fire line up. I was supposed to re-create my guitar solos on these shows, but for personal reasons, I had to withdraw. I am told the shows went very well, with narration from the concept's original producer, Ray Hammond and that there will be a CD available soon of the live concert. all Strawbs and related info from

<http://www.strawbsweb.co.uk/index0.htm>

Something that has stuck in my mind for many years is the show Johnny and I played at Buxton Civic with the original Strawbs line up. In one of the bars their was an organist playing by the name of Esme Hand. What an apt name for a female keyboard player! So for everyone mentioned, there is certainly life during and after The Strawbs. Don't know what happened to Esme however?