“You've got to live a life to write.

And I’ve lived that life.”

*Ichinchilla 2022*

Your music is really atmospheric. Has it been used in films?

Tracks from the album were used in the award winning movie ‘Lost Angelas’ as well as ‘Eurotrash’, Gregory Peck’s grandson's first-ever movie. They’re using 7 Ichinchilla tracks in the movie which led to a trip to the red carpet in LA.

It was a thrill to have the music up on the big screen. And when it actually came on, I remember it was akin to hearing the first single record single ‘Record Player’ in a nightclub and just sitting there thinking, ‘Is that me? Is that my track playing?’

It took several moments to realise that it was, and everyone was dancing to it. And then they all played it again. Which was the story behind ‘Record Player’ at the time, the first release. It just took off - and Rough Trade sold out.

Recently I was asked to write songs for films-working from the script and creating theme songs, working with Directors Martin Askew in London and John Jacobs in Los Angeles. Great fun and so satisfying.

The Rough Trade Experience

That was my primary and maybe only goal at the time. My ambition was to print and press a single and for Rough Trade to say ‘yes’ to it. I pressed 7-inch singles, 12-inch singles, coloured vinyl, die cut, I did all the things that I'd wanted to do since I was a kid. They have a record player in the shop, and they’d play your record when you went in. You stand there and it's playing and people in the shop sometimes stop and listen. They stopped and listened.

So, Rough Trade put in an order, and that sold out, so they doubled the order, and that sold out, too! And that was as far as I only imagined it would go. But then that led to the offer of a record deal with Sony. And I turned it down. I was slightly fearful of it and a bit anti-music-industry – probably still am a bit….

So, Sony…

The offer from Sony was tremendous. They thought I was so underground that they pretended to be a different label when they wrote to me, and they wouldn't say that they were Sony. It was quite funny, because then I was invited into the offices to meet with them. And of course, I went to the Sony offices in Great Malborough street. I wasn't sure why they needed to hide it. But they wanted to put out the singles.

With hindsight, perhaps I should have signed, it certainly would have saved me a lot of money, but I'm not sure how much control I would have had over it. And I really wanted to run the show – overseeing everything from artwork to videos. I just wanted to produce something that came from me, and I felt like that might have been taken away.

Do you have a record deal now?

Non. Not at the moment☺ Ichinchilla began a few years back. However over the years, I've managed to secure a few record contracts. One of those was with London Records, and it was a development deal. Actually, the development didn't really happen, but I did go into the studio with some great guys. At the time, I’d only ever written three songs. And they said I needed five. So, I wrote two more songs whilst in the studio. And, I think the others would agree, they turned out to be the best ones.

I really love being under pressure and having to produce and getting things done to a deadline. For example, not using too much instrumentation - just saying, ‘This is what we're going to use and make do’. Often because that’s all you have equipment wise anyway

What about management?

After that, I got myself some management. I approached Dave Margereson who was the manager of Supertramp. He loved my next demo, I rang him up and said, ‘Well, what do you think?’ And he said, ‘I love it, but I'm not taking any more artists on at the moment’. And I remember quite clearly saying to him ‘That really is your loss’, and he literally then stopped and said, ‘No, no, no. I love this enough. I'm going to take you on.’ So, I was signed to his record label, Redhead Records. And we put out a single under the name Ponce, c a track called: “Blessed” pretty sure Gary Crowley played it.

‘Lifestyle’ choices

I’ve made some☺ While all this was going on, I thought I should lead the life of a rock star. Super hedonistic and always out and about and consuming whatever I could consume. Believing that I was living life to its fullest. But things fall through the cracks when you're like that. I wasn't on it enough. Now I’m looking back at some of the music and thinking, ‘Well that song that got me signed to Redhead Records. That's a good track.’ So, I'm going back and listening to some of those old songs and giving them my best, sort of revisiting them.

I'm at a stage now where I feel right to revisit this. I've had a family, I've been running businesses, but the music's always been there. I’m someone who gets deeply involved in whatever I'm doing. Whether it’s running pubs with my brother, which I've been doing for 23 years now, or building motorcycles, or deciding to ride a motorcycle across the Sahara, in a race or whatever it is, I just go for it.

Is music work?

Being involved in the movie, ‘Lost Angelas’ was a big wake-up call because I watched the director/producer William Wayne working this movie. And I was just staggered at how hard he pushed and pushed. And he didn't go backwards. He just kept moving it forward and put huge amounts of effort into it over a sustained period.

I've always been about writing songs, getting in the studio, going home with a track and feeling pretty fulfilled. But now, I feel it's time to try and get the music out there a bit more. Put in some leg work instead of being a bedroom wizard☺

It all started with an ad in the back of a magazine.

The album, Zulu Landing, where Planet of Soul, the single, comes from, is partly the result of seeing an ad in the NME and meeting my now friend John Griffin. At one point he was Soul 2 Soul’s Jazzy B's engineer. So, he had real knowledge in his home studio setup. The two of us produced all of this together. I did all the singing and writing he and he engineered, played guitars and we produced together. We worked in his little bedroom/studio, putting this together for several years. John was able to program and play pretty much whatever I asked-super talented with a great sense of rhythm. He started out as a traditional tape op, getting the coffees and the teas - he'd done the legwork. When I chanced upon him, he’d just left his big studio and we started working together. We worked well, so this this is the result of that.

Tell us about your artwork

A friend mentioned to me that my artwork reminds him of pop art. And I think that’s really where I'm at. I absolutely love creating all my own original designs. I love primary colours - red, blue, yellow. When you start throwing pastels and things at me, I just fold.

How involved are you in the production process?

Very☺ I'm not a trained musician in any way. I'm an ideas guy, who likes to sing, loves to write songs, loves electronic music and pop culture in general–I enjoy synthesizer’s for writing because it helps my process and things can happen fairly fast, get so much bang for your buck with a synthesizer.

Digital vs Analogue. Who won?

I once had a collection of old vintage synths. And, in fact, we've got several vintage synths playing on Planet of Soul - some old Moogs and a Moog Prodigy, even an MS10 in there somewhere. At one point, I was trying to keep everything analogue - even down to mastering, where I got the guys to pull out their old tape machines that hadn't been used for 20 years. Instead of mastering digitally, we mastered on these great big old reel-to-reel machines which, considering we were creating electronic pop, was quite unusual. But it meant we had a fuller sound.

I like collecting things. Growing up, I was a collector of coloured Vinyl records. I've still got most of the collection – 7” colour Vinyl’s by Squeeze (because they always released things on coloured vinyl). This will initially go out digitally, though. But if there's a little bit of success, I won’t be able to resist producing 7-inch Vinyl.

There’s a lot of fun and wit in your music…

A lot of it is tongue-in-cheek. There’s sarcasm and a silly side. Yes, some of the songs are serious, but a lot of it’s really meant to make you laugh at times.

Not everyone got it, though. For example, the track Death Punk Electro. I mean, I kind of thought it was a ridiculous term – but good enough to write a song about and put it out. it was a dark song. meant to make you laugh and have fun. Yeah, nothing more, nothing less.

What has influenced your style?

I consider all the time up to now to have been a learning process. I grew up with punk, rockabilly, mods, disco, heavy metal and Ska. I lapped all of it up.

Why now?

There are just times and places for stuff, and I've done an awful lot since then. I sold every instrument and every piece of my recording studio thinking that that was it. I've done it. I don't need to do anymore. But actually, I think it gets into your blood. I’ve gone back and bought those same instruments and recording equipment again because it makes me feel good. And I want those keyboards around me, to restart this setup.

I’d love to get Planet of Soul on the radio. My wife Michelle spends so much time listening to BBC 6 Music, and it's infiltrated my brain. I hear certain artists and think ‘Why don't you push it more? You’ve got every chance of getting your music heard.’ It would be fantastic. Having a daughter saying ‘Dad, why aren't you doing the music?’ has been frustrating.

I’m involved from start to finish. I play on most tracks, but I know there are people out there who can play way better than me. I'm quite happy to find those people and push them to get the sounds, the rhythms that I want. It's always freed up my mind. Even as I started to learn to play guitar, I found myself being plagued by thinking, “I'll never really be able to play this in the way that I want it played.” So, I went to brilliant musicians who had spent decades perfecting their instruments.

So, seems like the time is right to get it back out there. The old me just wants to go back in the studio and start writing. But the new me says ‘Go back. Do your homework and push what you have created.’ It’s a huge amount of time, energy, creativity that I put into getting the songs done. Plus I’m probably a bit smarter than I was then.

What do your wife and family think?

My daughter Abigail is on the cover of the artwork. It's a fun thing for her to have done, and there is a side of this of a Dad doing this for his daughter. My wife is pretty long-suffering – Michelle thinks ‘Oh my god, no. You're not going back again?’ But if we manage to generate something, I’m sure she’ll come on board.

I’m still running pubs with my brother. And I'm very loyal to him and to our businesses. Having said that, he would have no problem with me just doing music.

Isn’t pop music just for young people?

I'm quite juvenile. I sometimes literally curse myself for not behaving more how I perceive a grown man should. But I don't seem to have it in me. I'm a perpetual child. I still love all the things I always loved. I haven't stopped riding motorbikes, making music, being silly, having fun. I don't feel anywhere near as old as I am. I've carried quite a weight of responsibility in these recent years. But in terms of ‘young’, I don't know. When you hear a song on the radio, you don't really know how old the person is singing it, do you?

Music under Lockdown

Having that huge amount of time was interesting. Although I was extremely busy looking after my daughter through that period, there were moments of listening to the songs and reflecting, ‘Did I even pick the right first record to release? Should it have been the second single?’ I certainly didn't promote or plan anything in any shape or form. But no creating just reflection.

Time for some name-dropping…

Over time, I have worked with quite a few interesting people. I was once in a band with members of Generation X and we rehearsed at one point with a former sex pistol. And growing up I remember distinctly; I was 13 or 14 in a nightclub in in Central London. And Phil Lynott befriended me. And I guess he liked the way I looked, I was a young, rockabilly punk, I was wearing cool clothes. I was a regular at the Embassy Club in Dover Street. And it was a good rock and roll haunt, and I was very young to be there.

I can remember Phil saying to me, ‘Oh, you're going to be a rock and roll star.’ And I've kind of clung to that. I've always thought, well, maybe. I think I just thought I was, but I hadn't done enough to really be that in some respects, but I felt I was yeah, that's all right.

It wasn't just Phil Lynott, who told me I'd be a star, it was the Clash’s manager, Bernie Rhodes, as well, when I was in a band with Mark Laff from GenX, he used to manage a band called The 20 Flight Rockers, and they imploded. Then there was a new band set up with Lemmy’s son, Paul writing and producing and I was the singer. I’d never sang in a band before, great experience And funnily enough, one of my favourite singles growing up was King Rocker, by Generation X. And then, in the studio in MY band was one of Generation X. And I didn't really realise! Anyway Bernie once threw his arm around me and said, ‘I'm going to make you a star’. I found it pretty amusing, but it makes for a good story.

Also I was asked to go tour with one of my favourite songwriters- Chris Difford from Squeeze (First New Wave/Punk band I saw at the Lyceum at 13 years old). So, we put together some unplugged versions, which I’ve still got on cassette, but I don't think they were very good. And again, it was down to the fact that I'd only written three songs. And now I was being asked to do unplugged. I had no way with all to start to do unplugged versions of something that I'd just about had the ability to do the original version anyway.

A demo had managed to go all the way to A&M. And the Police's manager called me because Chris played it to him.

Chris was undoubtedly also one of the best contemporary songwriters. I grew up listening to him and Glenn Tilbrook which is why I produced all my stuff on coloured vinyl, because of Squeeze. But the phone call from Chris Difford and the answerphone message were a fun moment

I was doing some music with a fantastic musician called Toby Anderson for a while - he was responsible for writing all the songs for Curiosity killed the Cat.

Sometimes I think I've over-lived a life and crammed so much in that I'm embarrassed to talk about it because it kind of sounds like it might not be true. And I think ‘How could you possibly have done all that?’ But it's just how it is and what I've done and yet in another sentence I just think I’ve actually achieved little.

Any plans to perform live?

There’s been a few Ichinchilla gigs and I do mean a few, that will be something to move ahead with the new single. Looking forward to it!

What do you hope people get from listening to Planet of Soul?

All those sorts of romantic, amazing moments to possibly have your music as the backdrop to. Maybe that same passion, love, journey, moment in time.

I think that's because that's how I remember music, whether it's the first hearing of the Ramones, or the first hearing of Depeche Mode or something like that, I can go back to those moments. And we can focus where we were and what we were doing. And I'd hope that the maybe the songs could have that possible influence on someone else. That would be amazing.

Why Planet of Soul now?

I love the phrase Planet of Soul. I think it has nuance and depth. I thought it had a dream ethos to it, and it was about longing for a better planet, a kinder planet. Was that planet somewhere else? Or was that that place just exactly where we're sitting right now? It's written from the perspective of being in space and looking back. Possibly just being a small child and wondering what the fuck was going on.

I may have written this a few years ago, but the sentiment is stronger now than ever. It's everyone wondering what the hell's going on with the planet. It's got some dreaminess to it. And it's got some fun in it - lines like in ‘Mother, do you believe in Utopia? It's like a hexagon. It's like a square’. I absolutely love the sound of those words. Everything in life takes different shapes. And what does anything really look like?

There’s a bit of desperation in the song, a lot of worry. But it’s delivered through a joyful dance track. I remember I was in a club and the DJ asked me which song to play. We popped it on, and a whole bunch of people just started dancing to it straightaway. And then they came over to the bar afterwards, and they we're being very friendly. They said they absolutely loved it, and I think that moment stayed with me forever, because it was just such a golden moment. But it also made me think, ‘Perhaps this should be a single.’

I think this is the one of the best songs on the album. Definitely. The most natural one. And I'm singing the choruses and the verses very differently. There's a real naturalness to the voice and I remember Griff saying, ‘it's really pure’. As we limited the sounds to just the key ones.

I don't see it as being overly 80’s sounding but it probably is. Heroes David Bowie meets Depeche Mode and some early Hip Hop drums.

Apart from the music, what else have you done?

I've been everything from a builder to a to a motorcycle courier to working in many bars, nightclubs and restaurants, like Zanzibar - the very first ever member’s club of its type. I used to work at Ronnie Scott's for two years, and at Fred's Bar. I was the opening bartender for Cafe Med, taken on to get the bar up and running at their very first premises. And I later became the manager at the Clipper Bar above the Wolseley, which was tough.

But I loved motorcycle couriering. I was in charge of my own destiny; I lcraved the freedom. It was just great fun, and I earned quite good money doing it...

Did school turn you into a punk?

I was very young when I chose not to go back to school. Done and dusted and untrainable. I would swear blind I was going to do one thing, and I'd literally do the opposite. It's just how I was. And I think it was from years and years of being at boarding school, being told what to do. You eventually just stick your fingers up... And then punk rock came along. And I was like, Oh. My. God.

Some of the sincerest punk rockers I knew we were ex-public-school types. They had so much to rebel against. They knew the system that they were rebelling against - it was their very own. They were part of it. And they became more punk than the punks. It’d make a good song or even better a movie. We got into a lot of trouble, really. It was part of growing up, but it was a rebellion against the very system that we were being shoved into.

Why ichinchilla?

When people just read it, they sometimes pronounce it ‘Itching Cilla’.

But the reason for the name is that it sounds good in French. That's how my French-speaking wife would say ‘Shlila’. It was originally from a French comedy. She and I thought it was a good name for a band.

Are you a perfectionist?

I think one of the talents I have, is envisaging sound and being able to understand my own music. I'm a bit bossy about how I want it. I get an idea of how I want it to sound like, and I'll argue it through till I'm blue in the face especially with people who would be seemingly far better qualified.

The drums on this are special…

All the sounds in this in this song are mostly analogue. The drum programming, the complicated rhythms are Griff in action. We would sit there in the studio, sometimes for days, where he would programme extremely complex drum patterns. It was a process we had to go through. I just let him get on with it. Sit back there and yeah, hours and hours of studio time, but it didn’t matter. It sounded great.

Do you think living in Camden has made a difference to your music?

I think Camden is just such a great place to live. It's got all that sort of rock and roll immortality, hasn't it? Immortality through music. Although it's changed so much since the place where I settled. I've moved around all over London for so long, but Camden seems to be in the place where I put my roots down, although I lived in West London for 20 years. Different memories from there that I have from Camden – Still love West London but very rarely get there these days.

People like to identify where you've come from. Camden is somewhere that everyone knows. And it’s still cool.