



Brighton Icon: “Scottish” Tony Richardson

By David Morrison

“Everything that happens to me is *bizarre*,” “Scottish” Tony Richardson tells me on the day that Elliott Smith plunged a knife into his heart. Even the fact that we obviously unwittingly planned that day to meet seems ample illustration to this end.

There is no doubting that Tony’s life has run far from the average. But now, in unfortunate but typically ‘Tony circumstances’, his existence is ominously threatened by the cruelest twist yet. It’s called Waldenström’s Macroglobulinemia, and unless his colourful innings suitably ends by, say, being hit by a meteorite, this unfeasibly rare, chronic blood cancer is likely to kill him.

Then again, his relentless drive and determination may have something to say about that. Tony is the man behind the remarkable success of *The Electric Soft Parade*, in whom he placed what a great many muso types around town considered unfathomable and misplaced faith.

It was only four years ago that Tony first encountered Tom and Alex White. Naturally, this could only have been shortly after having received a CD from then bassist Ali Gavan’s mother at the nursery school attended by his daughter Skye. Fresh from a management stint with *Kinky Journo*, he loved what he heard and dived straight in. The talented teens he now deservedly and smugly refers to with glowing paternal pride as “my boys” became an obsession. He financed an album (recorded as *The Feltro Media*), but beyond a gaggle of teenage followers, few would listen.

“I really like to fuck with the industry, prove it and *them* wrong,” spouts an animated Tony, recalling those days. “With my boys, they were wrong... and I was right. Clare Sturgess from XFM played *Sumatran*, recorded by Tom when he was 15; I got a call from db Records, then it all kicked off.”

Kick off it did, with a Mercury Music Prize nomination for the db released *Holes in the Wall* around a year later. You know the rest.

Born in Galashiels, Scotland in 1958 and resident in Brighton since 1979, Tony’s portal to the music industry he so distrusts but could not do without, was as a DJ in the early 70s. Since then, he has been a decorator, self-confessed “wheeler dealer”, professional rugby player (most notably as fly half for Racing Club of Nice, his career curtailed by a broken jaw) and a professional ocean sailor. He was also sentenced to 12 years in a Spanish jail for involvement in “a serious incident with some military guys.” Four and a half months later, Tony was unexpectedly booted out of Spain: “I was released on Christmas Day, 1985. Bizarre.”

On April 30th 2002, Tony found himself in Charing Cross Hospital. Considering everything that happens to him does indeed seem bizarre, you shouldn’t be too surprised to

discover that this was Tom's 18th birthday and that Tony had to leave The Electric Soft Parade's recording on *Later* to attend the infirmary. Suffering from severe wrist pains, he was told he had a broken arm. In January last year, he contracted shingles and the pains returned. After numerous tests, Waldenstrom's was diagnosed on April 30th. Attacking the lymphatic system, this condition assaults 3 in a million unfortunates, making Tony the first recorded case in Sussex – as he would undoubtedly expect.

Now undergoing chemotherapy, Tony appears half the weight he was six months ago. Yet none of the steel to carry on as normal, to wring the last drop from every single day he is given, has left him. He is still breezing around town in his trademark sheepskin coat as he always has, making circuits of anywhere that sells music to buy and sell records and spot any opportunity of local promise.

Bolstered by a strict, largely self-designed diet of - amongst other unconventional foodstuffs - apricot kernels, shark cartilage and a whole pineapple every morning, he continues to do what he has done for four years – keeping all who have grown to be inspired by his unbending faith in his boys informed of their every move. It's possible that we know what they're up to before they do, but in sucking in everyone he possibly can, Tony ensures that Tom and Alex have that extra player. It's impossible not to be impressed and even a little moved by such devotion.

Although having had to take his foot off the pedal – but only due to his treatment schedule – Tony is still very much actively managing the band, attending meetings wherever needed, often straight from a hook-up to a drip containing toxins. Attempting to arrange a photo session, he informed me he “can't do Wednesday; I'll be in Brussels, but only for a day.” Thursday was fine.

For a man suffering from an incurable, unpredictable and progressively debilitating blood cancer, his energy is bewildering. It should be said at this juncture that The Electric Soft Parade is now not Tony's only musical concern. There is also The Upper Room, who he confidently predicts will be massive this year. The woeful Kinky Journo aside, we have no reason to doubt him.

He is also heavily involved with Actress Hands and Ali Gavan's new project Diomedes, investing in each as much time and passion as his E.S.P day job and failing health will permit.

As someone who has endured four months of a full-on chemo regime for a coincidentally rare, but curable cancer, I can relate entirely to what Tony is going through physically, but am at a loss as to how he is piling into life as he is. Such bull-headedness to get the fuck on with it is rare, so should be respected and applauded.

Though undeniably amplified by his current situation, Tony Richardson has already earned his place in local legend. He knows it, revels in it, and is very proud of what he, Tom and Alex have achieved to date. Citing the disciplines and teamwork ethics of his rugby career as the foundations for everything he has learned about how to successfully manage a rock band, he delights in relating their subsequent experiences in lofty rock circles. Name-dropping is part of the spivish shiftiness of this engaging character, so there are few around town that don't know of when he met Isaac Hayes or had lunch with Thurston Moore. He even claims that Alan McGee considers his “the greatest rock ‘n’ roll story of all time.” “So what? I'm lucky enough to meet a lot of interesting people,” he retorts in defence.

So, on he ploughs in his direct, part Peter Grant, part Del Boy manner, steering all

of his boys as high as they can go whilst relishing the prospect of an imminent stem cell transplant. He won't stop until he is stopped, it seems. It's apparent that when that could be is of no concern to Tony, as there is still a lot of rock 'n' roll to be overseen and heroes to be told how shit their business is.

"I just thought everybody else was wrong," he says again of the key to his triumphs, "and still do." Let's hope that one day soon this will refer to his confounded doctors. That *would* be bizarre.

For 'The Source' magazine, Brighton, UK, January 2004