

PEBBLES FROM THE SHORE OF THE SUN - THE XTC INTERVIEW

It was perhaps inevitable that a Wiltshire-based magazine would sooner or later get around to assessing the career of that county's favourite sons, XTC. In truth however, whatever part of the world the Terrascope was based in would make XTC prime candidates for closer examination: long before the band produced those two prime snapshots of quasi-contemporary psychedelia under their "Dukes Of Stratosphear" alter ego's, XTC were showing signs of having their hearts shot through with paisley - an element which had been largely overlooked by the established media and which we felt was long overdue for an airing. And so, one warm afternoon in late summer I drove through the lanes to the edge of the great metropolis known as Swindon, and thence on through the blue-grey steel trading estates and into the older part of the town towards Dave Gregory's house where Dave, Andy Partridge and Charlie Parker the dog (Andy: "If I had another dog he'd be called 'Dizzy', and the third would be called 'Jimi'") awaited with a plate loaded with cakes and the kettle constantly on the boil. In between fighting with Charlie over the cakes and admiring Dave's new ('66) Gretsch guitar that an American admirer had given him, the three of us settled down to a typically Terrascope interview - passing quickly over the already well-documented history and digging deep into the misty past and the lesser-known facts behind the characters that go to make up XTC. The interview was actually a hell of a lot of fun to do - you'll notice for example that I simply had to guide the thing in the right direction as Andy and Dave ran the interview themselves, so with one quick intro from me I'll hand over to them...

Ptolemaic Terrascope (PT): Let's go right back. What were you both doing before XTC?

Andy Partridge (AP): As soon as I could hold a guitar - not play it, but just hold the thing - I wanted to be in a band so I could fish the girls out from the audience. The guitar was like a many-stringed fishing rod to me. My first "real" band was when I was 16: I was at Swindon College, and went for an audition with a band set up by people in the college called "Stray Blues" [after "Stray Cat Blues" by the Rolling Stones]. The audition was down the back of some garages on the Marlborough Road - I had to wait in line with my guitar, and there was this older guy who was really good and it was obvious he was going to get the job. He was around 26 or 27 and might as well have been the Old Man of the Mountains as far as the rest of us were concerned - we were all about 16, in fact the drummer was 14 but he had a set of drums so he was in. Anyway, I stepped up and played this most awful row - I only knew three chords, E, A and D, and I couldn't play those in any logical progression, so I thought "that's it - he's got the job". But they came up to me the next day in the college refectory and asked me to join all the same - it seemed this other bloke was just too good and would have showed 'em all up. So I was in Stray Blues. We used to borrow equipment to do gigs, and had a rhythm guitarist who was so atrocious he wasn't allowed to play....

PT: What?!? Did he look good or something?

AP: No, he didn't even look good. He was a sort of lumpy, swotty kid - but he had a couple of really good guitars, so the poor sod used to come along to the gigs and be asked to sit it out while I used his guitar. This was in 1969 or so.

Dave Gregory (DG): I'm sure I saw Stray Blues play up at McKilroy's Ballroom (in Swindon). There used to be a "hop" there where local bands would get a half-hour spot and receive something like £8 for it. I was there one Monday night and Andy was up there with his guitar... you'd have to remember this was the height of the skinhead movement, and they always had it in for us hippies and would make things as difficult as possible.

AP: There was a lot of skinheads at that particular gig, I remember. I borrowed a big amplifier from Pete Cousins, who now goes out under the name of Teddy White; he had a disco called the T.F. Much Disco with a 100 Watt Marshall amplifier.

PT: That's T.F. Much as in "Too Fucking Much" I take it?

AP: Yeah! The thing was, Stray Blues used to make their songs up as they went along. Basically it had to involve E, A and D for me to be able to play it. The singer, Martin, would turn round to the rest of us and say "Shall we do a fast 'un, then?" (Andy breaks into broad Wiltshire accent) "What key?" and he'd have a pocket full of harmonicas so he'd pull one out at random and say "better make it in A", and off we'd go. We did one number and the skinheads started booing and throwing pennies - the old ones, which were much heavier than today's. They were getting pretty nasty so the DJ told us to get off; Martin pleaded with him to let us do one more "song", so I hid behind the stack while the pennies started coming over really hard. We did it in E for a change, "Steel Blues" I think it was called, because I'd just got this bottleneck I wanted to try out. That was it though - our third and final gig ended after two numbers.

PT: So you two (Dave and Andy) didn't really know one another at the time?

AP: I used to go and see Dave when he was in a band called "Pink Warmth"; the first time was at St. Peter's Church Hall in Penhill, before I'd even played a guitar. As soon as I saw him I thought, "Bloody Hell! I'd like to be that good one day..." I was there trying to get off with a girl called Caroline, who would wander around with no shoes on and hand out fluorescent painted shells...

PT: Whoo!

AP: (proudly) I've still got my shell. Meanwhile, Pink Warmth were making it difficult for me to chat her up with this barrage of 30 Watt feedback.

PT: So what sort of material would Pink Warmth have been playing at that time?

DG: We did "What You Gonna Do About It?" by the Small Faces - and I think we tried to do "Tin Soldier". There were some Hendrix covers as well, probably "If 6 Was 9" as it was an excuse to smash up our gear afterwards. It was mostly fluorescent pop music - a lot of stuff by The Troggs because it was so easy to play. We had coloured lights, too! The drummer, a guy called Tich Adams, had a spanking new drum kit. His mum made him a Kaftan [general hilarity all around...], so every time we played he wore that, we shone the lights on his nice new Premier drum kit and we actually *looked* like a proper group. Of course, when we came to actually playing it was a different matter...

AP: So by the time I was in Stray Blues in 1969, what were you up to Dave?

DG: I was in a band called Orange. Pink Warmth split in February 1969 when Tich's mum decided he should devote his time to studying for our impending O-levels. Joe [Shurey - bass player] and I couldn't be bothered to wait until summer to be playing again, so when an old friend of mine called Tony Climpson returned from school for Easter we got together and formed Orange. He was then expelled from school during summer term so we were able to continue rehearsing.

PT: So he got his revenge by playing there...

DG: That's how we got the gig, yeah. We were the first power blues trio in Swindon - influenced by Taste and Free and the first Zeppelin album. Not Cream - they were too good for us.

AP: You have to remember that Cream were in the charts by then - they lost a lot of followers through that.

DG: We could never get any work, just kids' parties and the local community hall. We had a pretty unprofessional attitude - like we never owned a P.A. system; we had a great friend called Terry Jackson who bought a van (which we painted orange...) and drove us and our guitars and amps to and from gigs. He would scavenge around for bits of P.A. equipment for us as well. I can remember one occasion when the bass player had a date with his girl friend on a "gig" night, and half way through the set he just put his bass down and bugged off to meet her, leaving the three of us (Tony Climpson, myself and Rod Sheppard the vocalist) to finish the show!

AP: I used to literally bump into Dave in a music shop of a Saturday morning. We'd both be getting guitars off the wall, practising on a little amp - basically I was getting part-time 10 minute music lessons from him on Saturdays.

PT: So where did your musical career go from then, Andy?

AP: I left college in the early 70's, started work and kept trying to get bands together. I went through a whole succession of groups, one of them was called "Stiff Beach" - then

my guitar playing got a little better and I got into more exploratory, avant-garde stuff. I got together with this enigmatic character who looms large in my musical education called Spud Taylor. He was one of life's God-given beatniks. He was honking on a saxophone, and we had a drummer with us who was the head of a local cement firm - he was a lot older than us. We were going to be called "Tongue" because Spud insisted that the tongue is the most exploratory part of the human body. We never did any gigs, just rehearsed and rehearsed. One of the songs was this very oblique riff that sounded like "East Broadway Rundown" [Sonny Rollins] but inside out... it was called "Pterodactyl" and was basically just an excuse to do this riff and then get on with the serious business of feeding back and rumbling around. So Stiff Beach never really happened, Tongue never did any gigs... I did eventually do a gig with the remnants of Stiff Beach, who became Clark Kent (not Stuart Copeland's bunch - this was in about 1971). We did one official gig, at Headlands School in Swindon, which is where I first saw Colin Moulding. He'd been expelled because his hair was too long, and he came back for this gig. I remember seeing him: we'd emptied the hall the noise was so horrible, and the lights were on full blaze when the doors swung open and this character staggered in drunk with hair down to his waist and a bottle of cider in his hand. That was my first sighting of Colin Moulding - after that I'd often spot him lying drunk in a gutter somewhere covered in vomit. Anyway, I then became involved with yet another beatnik character called Paul, who eventually became a Scientologist. He was a great jazzy drummer, but not too hot at the pop stuff which is where I wanted to be. We had a loose ensemble group called Star Park - somebody later pointed out to us that the name was actually "Rats Krap" backwards. I didn't realise that at the time. I was really keen on the New York Dolls around then, 1973 or so; totally in love with Iggy and the Stooges, Alice Cooper, all the bands that looked outrageous. The best bits of Star Park mutated into The Helium Kidz, which was myself on guitar and vocals; Colin Moulding on bass - he never sang at that time, in fact I can't remember him ever speaking. His nickname was "curtains" because his hair came down so far over his face that you could only see his nose poking out. Terry Chambers, who was a friend of Colin's, was the drummer - except that he had to play with a leather glove on because drumming made one of his hands go septic. He became known as Terry "Blackhand" Chambers.

DG & PT: Nice!

AP: Hmm. Anyway, we had another guitarist as well who also barked into the microphone - his name was Dave Cartner. His stage-name was "Dino Salvadore", mainly because he was into Dino from the Flintstones. He was roughly the same shape, as well. My stage name was "Zip Code" -initially we were called Zip Code And The Helium Kidz, but that didn't last long. I can actually take the Helium Kidz up to around 1975, so you've got some catching up to do, Dave...

DG: Orange split up in 1970 for various reasons and I didn't play again for 18 months or so - until it came to the point where I had to decide whether to sell all my stuff and buy a car, or go out there and make enough money to pay for the equipment I already had. It

occurred to me that it might be an idea just to join a pop group and make a bit of money, so that's what I did - in fact, I got a deal with a Country & Western band.

AP: You've got a dark past you have! Are you sure you want this in print?

DG: Well, I needn't name names. I was with this band during the summer of '72, and eventually I got on so well with the guys that it just ended up being a social thing. That carried on for about a year, until I happened to meet up with a character called "Mole" [Larry Williams] in a music shop in Swindon. He came from Calne, and had just split up from his band "Skin Deep" who did a lot of local gigs. We promised each other we'd get together and see what we could do, so in August 1973 we did just that; brought in Tony Green (bass player with Skin Deep), a drummer called Tony McCondach, who was the most phenomenal drummer I'd ever played with. The first rehearsal was at Calne town hall, and McCondach turned up without his drums. I remember wondering whether he was a time waster, but then by the second rehearsal he'd remembered to bring them along with him and he was in! We decided that was it, it was really good but we needed a singer. I can't recall how it came about, but Rod Goodway came back to Calne after his stint with Magic Muscle, and he seemed like the ideal man. He joined, we called ourselves Alehouse, and played anything we could get away with that featured twin guitars, bass, drums and a vocalist. Beck, Bogert and Appice were one of the bands big in our legend, I recall. We played our first gig at the Brunel Rooms in Swindon in February 1974, did a recording test for Harvest records in November 1975 and when nothing really developed from that a lot of the steam went out of the band and we lost heart. We finally split up in the Spring of '76, which means I've gone on ahead of you a little now, Andy:

AP: That's right. We were the Helium Kidz from 1972/73 right up until 1975; we started out very "glam-rock" indeed - it was all down to the look and the style, the music was just 3 or 4 chords like the Stooges or the Dolls.

PT: E, A and D perhaps?!?

AP: Well no, I'd learned a few more by that time but I was writing songs that were all in that vein. We were too snotty and arrogant to do covers of other peoples' stuff so we'd do sort of surrogate songs - instead of "Jet Boy" (New York Dolls) we'd have "Jet Shoes", which was in praise of platform boots. I had a pretty loud wardrobe to wear on stage... I was much more skeletal then and could get away with it.

PT: Come on then, tell us about your glam-rock wardrobe...

AP: I had a pair of gold fur trousers with a 3 foot long tiger's tail hanging down from the arse. The trousers were skin-tight and ended about a foot above my ankles which were adorned in black stack-heel boots. I had a penis in heart-shaped studs that went about a foot down my left leg, and the trousers were cut so they came right up under my armpits, with little kiddies braces holding them up. Under that was a cut off shirt covered in star-

shaped studs, a little black corduroy jacket covered in metal door letters that spelled "ZIP" across one breast, a silver bowler hat covered in mirrors perched on my head and I made a pair of glasses out of silver card which came up a foot or so out of each side of my head and ended in lightning flashes like huge antennae. For some gigs I'd made myself a Captain America shield, but it usually got whanged off after a couple of numbers because it made it fucking difficult to strum the guitar. I've not owned up about that shield to too many people before.

PT: You could have perhaps made a shield-shaped guitar painted in Captain America decals?

AP: Oh no, I'd already made myself a Flying V guitar out of a huge lump of old wood, but I couldn't afford more than two machine heads so it was a two-stringed Flying V. I only used it once or twice, doing a two-stringed solo.

PT: So The Helium Kidz started off very camp, heavily made up and wearing outrageous costumes - I take it that didn't last very long, because times were changing pretty fast by then?

AP: Yeah, after about a year or so we kind of gravitated down towards denims and dirty T-shirts. By 1975 I was so heavily bored with all the normal conventions of work and so-on that I thought if I could be in a proper group I could maybe stay on the dole and continue drinking and living with me mum - a lifestyle I'd grown to like. But first we had to sharpen up the group a bit, so I set about trying to re-design it from scratch, with a new name and a new look. I got my hair cut off, and I could see the band wearing big baggy boiler suits with a kind of futuristic, fast looking rock & roll look.

PT: Pre-empting bands like Devo by several years, in fact?

AP: Well, yes it did actually - although there were sort of rumblings of American punk coming over in a similar vein, stuff like Handsome Dick Manitoba and the Dictators. So anyway, I decided to redesign the band and I knew we needed a new name, although thinking about it we should have kept The Helium Kidz which was pretty good anyway. It had to be shorter and more punchy though: of the two names at the top of the list, one was short and impactive which was XTC and the other was The Dukes of Stratosphere which was way too psychedelic sounding. In the end we stuck with XTC which described the sort of music I wanted to get into, which was basically chopped-down pop songs. We'd got a keyboard player in by that time called Jon Perkins, who's actually signed up by Chrysalis now I believe, and we did some demos as XTC. They were still nonsensical songs, but more about specific subjects. "Neon Shuffle" was one of them.

PT: So just run through the original line-up for me...

AP: At the time of redesigning the band, XTC consisted of myself on guitar, Colin Moulding on bass, Terry Chambers on drums - and we were in the process of firing Dave

Cartner because he'd just got married and his mother-in-law kept forbidding him to stay out late at nights. We also dallied around with a singer from London called Steve Hutchings who was actually a good singer - he could wobble his voice - plus he knew some people in the record companies which was useful. My girlfriend heard him singing while he was up a ladder cleaning windows and invited him down to audition. He was actually quite a bit older than the rest of us - as became apparent when he tried to change the name of the band to "Steve Z and the Zodiacs", which is actually so square it's almost interesting. Eventually we hit on an awful kind of compromise, which was to change the name sporadically from The Helium Kidz - I'm going back a few months here - to Skyscraper, which was his big idea. Somehow we ended up doing a few gigs without telling him, for which we went out under the name of The Snakes (a lot more penile as far as we were concerned) and that was when I realised, "Hey, this singing lark ain't difficult after all!" So that was it - he was sacked and I redesigned the band.

PT: When did Barry Andrews come in on keyboards?

AP: Well, the aforementioned Jon Perkins came in as Dave Cartner was leaving - this was in maybe late 1976. We had a demo session for CBS lined up, and a week before we were due to go to the session we found out that Perkins was two-timing us, with his own band which was called Stadium Dogs...

PT: I've heard of them - didn't they put an album out?

AP: That's right, which interestingly enough also featured Pete Cousins, Mr. T.F. Much himself. Anyway, we found this out and Colin and I went round to try to get him to stay with us, at least until we'd done this demo session. It didn't work, so off he went and we were in a panic since CBS had particularly said they liked the keyboard sound. I went to the local music shop, saw a card in the window saying "keyboard player - Barry Andrews" and giving an address, which I went to and found this peculiar looking balding fellow with a London accent. We went and got extremely drunk together, decided he was the man for us and we did the session with Barry on keyboards.

PT: He went on to play with Robert Fripp, didn't he?

AP: He did, he made one album and then joined the regular band Fripp got together called "League Of Gentlemen". Anyway, that more or less takes us up to when we started gigging regularly around London as XTC, so it's all pretty much well-known history from here on in.

PT: You didn't sign to CBS in the end though?

AP: We were going to sign with Island at one point - actually, we nearly ended up with Harvest, but their A&R man got into a pissed-up stupor in a London pub and insulted our manager's wife! She was pretty insultable mind - a bit like a poodle, same hair and same

temperament. Then like I say we were going to sign with Island, but Virgin topped the price at the last moment.

PT: You seemed to have all the major labels after you almost straight away - was that largely a matter of luck, or because there just weren't any small labels around at that time?

AP: There weren't many small labels. The only one we'd heard of was The Buzzcocks, who put out "Spiral Scratch" on the Spiral Scratch label.

PT: Did you think of yourselves as a punk group?

AP: I think people considered us as a punk group, so we didn't fight it although we didn't really do anything that felt like we were selling out or specifically changing. Really, since 1974/75 we'd been mutating into that kind of group anyway - I suppose in a way 1977 was no different to 1967 when you had all those strands of psychedelia coming together. We should really have had an explosion in 1987 - I think there was, but it was more of a mechanical one than a people one. The big revolution was sequencers, cheap drum machines, sampling - all mechanical. The next revolution's got to be a people one... but I'm getting away from the point.

PT: So XTC took off, and away it went...

AP: Off it went in fits and starts, actually. We recorded "White Music" and thought, this is it - we're in a big studio, making an album, it'll go to Number 1 and we'll all be able to retire. Of course, it doesn't really happen like that. We seemed to appear on every kids' show for a while; Magpie, Crackerjack - all of them, and then there was suddenly this big period of confusion where you realise the album isn't selling as well as you thought and you wonder what the hell to do next. Barry Andrews was getting uppity and wanted his own band, so he left in 1979 and the only other musician I knew had to join the band: enter Dave Gregory - the Pink Warmth cast-off had to complete the circle.

DG: I officially joined XTC in February or March 1979. After Alehouse split up I'd joined this 3-piece symphonic band in the Forest Of Dean. They were sort of cousins of Nice musically, called Profile - later known as Gog Magog. They were good musicians, but ludicrously out of touch with the times. So I returned to Swindon because my money had run out and we had no gigs, got a regular job driving a delivery van and eventually got involved with an R&B band called Dean Gabber and his Gaberdines. We originally got together just for a laugh, but actually it was the most successful of all the semi-pro bands I'd been in.

AP: If they could have got around the sort of lavatorial flasher image that their front man had, they were actually an excellent band. Good fast beer-swilling music - kinda like Dr. Feelgood.

DG: That lasted about a year, and then I got the call from Andy to join XTC. We did the "Drums And Wires" album and I thought that was it, that was my 15 minutes of fame. Then of course Drums and Wires was clearly successful, so we had to make another album - and on it went.

AP: Before Dave was in the band full time, I'd already asked him whether he would be interested in coming to a studio to play on a fake psychedelic album - or EP it was, actually. This was back in 1978, but things got a bit hectic touring and so-on so I just never had time to do it.

PT: What gave you the idea for doing a "psychedelic" record - I mean, there wasn't exactly a lot of that sort of thing around in 1978, the Soft Boys had been dabbling but the first "new" psychedelic single I can recall was Nick Nicely's "Hilly Fields" in 1982...

AP: Right - when I first heard "Hilly Fields" I thought "Shit! This guy's beaten me to what I want to be doing!" - he didn't presumably do it for the same reasons that I wanted to, which was partly as a "thank you" but also because I wanted to be like all those bands I'd loved as a kid, but when he came out with that record I realised he'd pipped me to the post. It wasn't until 1984 that everything clicked into place and I was able to spend a bit of time doing my psychedelic tribute: we were mixing "Big Express" and I was already writing some songs for the project, like "Your Gold Dress" and "25 O'Clock", not really knowing when I was going to get the time to do it. I was supposed to be producing someone called Mary Margaret O'Hara, but got fired from the job because "my vibes weren't right" - John Leckie also got sacked because he was "an Orange person" [a Baghwan disciple] - she was a strict Catholic, and she wasn't going to have any member of a love-promoting sect in her studio... anyway, we both got sacked and I thought "Great! Now I can do '25 O'Clock!'" Virgin wouldn't fund the album because they considered it a joke and thought nobody would buy it, so eventually they said if we could do it for £5000 they'd allow us to have that much and no more. I wanted to make it as best quality as I could, so although we had enough material for a full album we only had enough money to do six songs. So it's a long EP or an emaciated album - either way, we gave them a thousand pounds change.

PT: Christ, I should have thought the sleeve alone would cost that much...

AP: No, I did the sleeve myself on my kitchen table, using my brother's photocopying machine and a pile of old books. One of them was an old Gamages Christmas Catalogue, and another was a 1968 book of copyright-free ad art. I got my scissors and glue out and stuck down a 2ft by 2ft cover, including the back, and sent the thing off to a design company in London to do the colouring. They did it first in all natural and pastel shades, but I returned it saying I wanted fluorescent colours and people with green faces and purple hair, that kind of thing. When it came back, they'd done it just right. I wanted it to smell originally, as well...

DG: That was on "Psonic Psunspot", wasn't it?

AP: Oh yes, that's right - it was. The idea was to have a strip of patchouli down the inside of the sleeve so when you pulled the record out you'd get this smell wafting out at you. I asked for it to be pressed in psychedelic vinyl as well, but neither idea really worked out: after the first few copies came off all the colours ran so it looked like a blob of Plasticene... actually, we were going to make one of the earlier albums smell: "Mummer" was originally going to be called "Fallen From The Garden" - I've still got the original sleeve artwork at home that never was. It featured the four of us sat there with fruit heads sat in front of this ruined country garden, and the albums were going to be in 4 different flavours, like apple, banana, orange and lemon. They tried it, sent me some samples but to be honest the whole lot smelled like shite so that idea never took off either.

PT: But the Dukes idea itself actually took off a lot better than you expected?

AP: Well, yes it did - I wanted to keep the whole thing very low-key to start with, make out it was some tapes Virgin had just unearthed which had lain hidden since 1967. I did an interview with Richard Skinner, in which I spoke *v e r y s l o w l y* and deadpan and had them affect the answers afterwards by adjusting the speed of the tape. People were ringing in saying "I know who it is! It's Phil Collins, isn't it?" or "It's those Pink Floyd people" - nobody guessed it was us.

PT: But the Dukes seemed to be going along really well, and then they kind of stopped very suddenly. Did you decide you'd had enough, that the joke had gone far enough already?

AP: Absolutely. The thing was, we shouldn't have made Psonic Pspot, except that I always wanted the project to be a full album, with a proper gatefold sleeve. A useless gatefold! People wrote in to us though: some thought the Dukes were a new band that XTC had taken under their wing so to speak and they were pleading with us to get in touch with the Dukes and ask them to record some more stuff. So I thought well, everybody seemed to like it and it made us feel good to sound like all the bands we liked as kids, to exorcise the ghost of Syd Barrett's "Scarecrow"...

PT: There's a video around of that with the Floyd leaping about in a field...

AP: Yeah, one of those Pathe News ones. They did two promotional videos for Arnold Layne as well: one is on a beach with a taylor's dummy, in fact we pinched that idea for the "Mole From The Ministry" video. Another idea we took was throwing buckets of water at one another... backwards. I actually think the "Mole From The Ministry" video was the best one we ever made - it was certainly the cheapest one we ever made. It was crammed full of puns and references to other promotional films of the times, like the running backwards with linked arms which was lifted from "Strawberry Fields".

PT: There were obviously references in the music, as well...

AP: Oh yes, every track contains a thousand and one things from that period - things like "Your Gold Dress" which contains super-compressed florid piano played at half speed like the Nicky Hopkins thing from "She's A Rainbow".

DG: That was actually slowed down to C major because I couldn't play the thing in C sharp.

AP Oh well, a bit of faulty history corrected there for you! Anyway, you could spend hours spotting all the references. Virgin wouldn't buy the "Mole" video in the end though.

PT: What about the other video the Dukes did, the one with the puppets in?

AP: The initial story behind that was that it was to feature the four Dukes kitted out in 1st World War uniforms in a trench and covered in mud. I was going to be the officer, and I'd blow a whistle, shout "over the top, men" or something and we'd all leap up and find ourselves walking into a pub and then get extremely drunk - as each line of the song was sung, another character would be added to the scene - boy scouts, circus folk, all getting drunk and singing "You're A Good Man, Albert Brown". At the end we'd get hoiked out and stuck back in the trench. Again, Virgin wouldn't buy it, told us we couldn't be seen drinking on TV in prime time.

PT: Oh, so the "Rover's Return" in Coronation Street is actually a coffee bar then...

DG: We were always getting told that we couldn't do something and then 6 months afterwards somebody else would be doing it. For example, we wanted Aardman Animations (we're big fans of their "conversation pieces") to do an animated plasticene video for one of the tracks from 'Big Express', but Virgin squashed the idea. Next thing we know, "Sledgehammer" is winning awards left, right and centre and Peter Gabriel is a superstar in the U.S. Mind you, I think he had to fund that video himself..

PT: What are you trying to do at the moment that people will be doing in 6 months time?

DG: We're between projects at the moment.

AP: "Resting between engagements".

PT: No more Dukes of Stratospher then - there's a couple of things on "Oranges and Lemons" (latest XTC album) that sound like they would have sat quite happily on either of the Dukes records though?

AP: Psychedelic music has had such an enormous influence on us over the years that it's been bubbling under the surface on all our albums. There's a lot of stuff on "Mummer" for example that could easily be filed under psychedelia, same thing on "Big Express". At least

three songs on "Psonic Pspot" were XTC songs originally. "You're My Drug" was intended for "Skylarking", as was "Little Lighthouse" which was recorded in San Francisco. The whole thing gets very blurred, even down to the name of the band. It would be nice to go on making Dukes albums, but the joke has maybe gone far enough.

PT: It seems a shame - couldn't you change the name and start again?

AP: Well yes, what I'd really like to do is make a sampler album where we're twelve different bands. It would feature bits and pieces of songs we never recorded plus stuff recorded especially for it. I can see we'd get into the same old problems with Virgin though. The thing is, sampler albums featured so big in our musical education. They were all you could afford, 15/- or 19/11 for a double, and usually you'd get the best or most interesting track from a whole variety of albums. It would be genuine love for us.

PT: Have you got any names stashed away for these 12 bands?

AP: There have always been a lot of alternative names about - the Dukes were going to be called Electric Bone Temple at one time; 25 O'Clock was going to be called "Pebbles From The Shore Of The Sun". "Psonic Pspot" was going to be "Psonic Pspot Stockade", but the Stockade got dropped. Or pushed over, yeah. Our albums usually had half a dozen titles in the process of being made... "Big Express" was nearly "Hard Blue Ray Head", and then "Bastard Son of Hard Blue Ray Head" at one point - then it became "Coal Face". Colin actually did some designs for the sleeve of "Coal Face".

PT: Finally, I've got to ask it - are there going to be any more live gigs in the near future?

AP: To be honest, the more people ask that one, the more defensive I get about it. Unless you need the cash, I can't see any point. If you do it right and get the merchandising side of it worked out, that's where you make the money - on T-shirt sales and the sales of albums on the back of the tour; so I suppose there is a big carrot there, since we're going to need cash fairly shortly - but I'd hate to have to do it just for money. At one point I couldn't see us ever doing the acoustic tour of US radio stations we did a while back, just playing live in a tiny little studio somewhere, but that went pretty well so you never know. I must confess, I do feel ready for a new direction of some sort, but I have no idea what it is yet. It's almost as if there's no point any more in recording anything that could be considered as a single, because nobody buys them any more - besides, Virgin always pick the safest song from an album as the single. "Sgt. Rock" for example - I really hate that song, it's just about the only thing I've ever written that I detest, but they picked it. They would never have considered picking "Chalk Hills And Children" from "Oranges And Lemons", for example. Having said that, we've always thought that what's on the single shouldn't be on the album, like it was in the 60's. A single's a single, and an album's an album. I prefer albums myself. I think we're extremely poppy, but it doesn't seem to click with the people that buy pop music, the 12 year old girls or whatever. The last time we were in the charts in the UK was in 1982, for instance. We're much more accepted in

America - in England we're just thought of as an old punk band, whereas the truth is we've actually been a thousand and one different bands. All struggling.

Interview by Phil McMullen, March 1991