



UNIVERSITY OF  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

This is a peer-reviewed, final published version of the following document:

**Deakin, Rich (2017) Profiled: Julian Cope. Vive Le Rock! (42).  
pp. 20-22.**

Official URL: <https://vivelerock.net/>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/14513>

### **Disclaimer**

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

# PROFILED JULIAN COPE

If ever the term “maverick” could truly be applied to a musician, then Julian Cope is surely more deserving of the soubriquet than most. As the Arch Drude embarks upon his latest UK tour to promote a new album, ‘Drunken Songs’, Rich Deakin recaps his long and illustrious career.

**E**MERGING from the early Liverpool punk scene in 1977, having left Tamworth the previous year to study there, Cope was a contemporary of the likes of Pete Burns, and was also in the short-lived but now legendary outfit The Crucial Three, with Ian McCulloch and Pete Wylie. McCulloch and Wylie went to form Echo & The Bunnymen and Wah! respectively, whilst Cope found fame as a post-punk pin-up with the Teardrop Explodes, storming the charts in 1981 with the infectious, brass-heavy single ‘Reward’. Later that year, Cope infamously appeared on Top of the Pops performing ‘Passionate Friend’ whilst tripping on LSD. All was not well within the band though, and relations between Cope, the band’s manager Bill Drummond, and fellow band member cum-co-manager Dave Balfe, were particularly fractious. In 1982 the Teardrops

exploded in a welter of debt, recriminations and lysergic overload.

After holing up back in his home town of Tamworth, Cope set about building a solo career, and Mercury Records released his first solo album, ‘World Shut Your Mouth’, in February 1984. It was largely a collection of shimmering pop songs tinged with psychedelic undertones. Despite the potential for commercial success, for some reason it bombed. An earlier infatuation with Scott Walker gave way in favour of Cope’s other great love, 1960s garage and psychedelia. His drug ingestion, particularly hallucinogenics, continued unabated, and by the time his second solo album, ‘Fried’, was released just six months later it looked for all the world like he’d completely lost the plot.

One of many warning signs must surely have been when he snapped a microphone stand in

half during a performance at Hammersmith Palais, and in an act of onstage self-mutilation worthy of Iggy Pop at his most outrageous, he proceeded to repeatedly gouge and cut his bare torso – in front of a dumbstruck audience. But, the cover of ‘Fried’ is perhaps as famous, if not more so, than the actual record itself. Cope appeared on the sleeve stripped naked, crawling on all fours under a turtle shell, playing with a toy van in the dirt. The album title perhaps reflected Cope’s state of mind perfectly at the time, and to all intents and purposes it was describing a man in full LSD induced neural meltdown. At this point he was destined to be remembered only as one of rock ‘n’ roll’s notorious acid casualties, in the same vein as Syd Barrett, Roky Erickson or Skip Spence. ‘Fried’ fared even less well than its predecessor, and Mercury, unable to cope with Cope’s increasingly erratic behaviour and perhaps more significantly, poor sales, cut him adrift.

Remarkably enough though Cope dusted himself down and pulled himself back from the abyss. With the help of a new manager, Cally Calloman, he was signed by Island, and bounced back by recording ‘Saint Julian’ in 1986. It was his most commercially successful album to date and included two particularly notable chart singles, ‘World Shut Your Mouth’ and ‘Trampoline’. The joy was short lived though, as his next album in 1988, ‘My Nation Underground’, received a critical mauling and sank into commercial oblivion – creating friction between himself and Island.

A chance happening across former MC5 mentor and White Panther Party founder, John Sinclair’s revolutionary tract Guitar Army proved to be something of an eye opener for Cope. Drawing on the credo of “Funkadelic and MC5’s White Panther trip of Community Enlightenment as the ultimate rock ‘n’ roll aim”, Cope decided that from now on whatever he did he was to be for the greater good of others.

The 1980s were not without moments of high drama for Cope then. But having undergone this dramatic epiphany, he temporarily resolved his differences with Island and armed with a higher state of political and spiritual consciousness he eventually re-emerged, reborn, and rejuvenated with the ‘Peggy Suicide’ album in 1991. Critically lauded and relatively well received commercially, the album was concerned with politics, organised religion, women’s rights, animal rights, spirituality, and ecology, among other issues. Several of the songs dealt specifically with the then still topical and much reviled Poll Tax. Cope himself was a vociferous opponent of the Bill, and an active protestor in the 1990 London anti-Poll Tax demonstration, during which he marched as an alter-ego called Sqwubbsy, dressed in a huge theatrical costume mask not dissimilar to 2000AD’s Tharg. ▶



◀ If Cope's newly heightened politicism and social awareness had begun to raise some eyebrows among record label execs, then his 1992 follow-up, 'Jehovahkill', soon proved to be beyond the pale for Island. With its overtly anti-Christian themes and attacks on the established church, Island dropped Cope within a week of 'Jehovahkill's' release, despite initially charting higher than 'Peggy Suicide'. Island's other argument was that critical success didn't necessarily equate to commercial success in the long run – as far as they were concerned, Cope was becoming too hot to handle.

Cope was then picked up by new label, Echo, whose first album release was Cope's 'Autogeddon'. Having put out a couple of semi-official bootlegs during one of his earlier disputes with Island, Cope continued to pursue his own less commercial activities, like the 'Rite' album and the Queen Elizabeth side-project. The latter was an exercise in experimental ambient music, which Echo even endorsed.

Two further albums, '20 Mothers' and 'Interpreter' followed on Echo, before Cope once again fell foul of his record company, and was dropped for allegedly refusing to visit the USA. Chartwise though, having notched-up three top 40 albums and three top 40 singles the Echo years proved to be Cope's most purple patch since the 'Saint Julian' era – the single 'Try, Try, Try' even earned him another Top of the Pops appearance in July 1995.

Throughout the 1990s Cope began to diversify into literature. His first volume of autobiographical memoirs was published in 1994, and a second volume *Repossessed* followed in 1999. In 1996 he published *Krautrock Sampler: One Head's Guide to the Great Kosmische Musik - 1968 Onwards*, to much acclaim. Then in 1998, *The Modern Antiquarian: A Pre-Millennial Odyssey Through Megalithic Britain*, Cope's thoroughly exhaustive examination of ancient monuments in the UK, was published and became an instant best-seller. In

subsequent years Cope has also written follow up tomes to these - *Japrock Sampler: How the Post-war Japanese Blew Their Minds on Rock 'n' Roll* and *The Megalithic European: The 21st Century Traveller in Prehistoric Europe*.

Following his departure from Echo, in 1997 Cope set up a record label branch of his Head Heritage organisation. Completely unshackled from the constraints of a corporate record company suited Cope well. Not only did it give him complete artistic control over his more conventional solo output, it also afforded him greater opportunities to indulge in even further out-there leftfield activities such as L.A.M.F. (ambient heavy metal), Brain Donor (a proto-heavy metal / glam rock side-project), and later on, Black Sheep.

Having always had the courage of his own convictions, Cope was now free to pursue all his passions on his own terms, whether commenting on Celtic art and identity at the British Museum, researching prehistoric archaeology and antiquarianism, or writing fiction. His first novel was published in 2014, *One Three One: A Time-Shifting Gnostic Hooligan Road Novel*. Primal Scream's Bobby Gillespie possibly sums up *One Three One* best when he describes it as, "A total skullfuck of a book, a hooligan saga of rave damaged psychic shipwrecks and mythic time travel."

But let's not deviate too far from his music! Cope has released numerous solo albums on Head Heritage since 1997, none of which, without the clout of a major label behind him, have bothered the charts. But, more uncompromising now than ever, chart success isn't perhaps as uppermost in Cope's mind as it was in the 1980s. The subject matter of some of his most recent albums – take 'Psychedelic Revolution' and 'Revolutionary Suicide' for example – was hardly going to set the mainstream album charts alight. His latest album 'Drunken Songs' is described by its press release as "six songs of Gnostic Inebriation from around these isles", you can be sure that this is hardly likely appeal to the X-Factor generation either! Having said that, 'Drink Me Under the Table (Drink Me)' harks back to a more classic poppy Cope sound, somewhat reminiscent of Pulp. So who knows?

In some people's eyes 'Drunken Songs' might seem a strange choice of subject matter, especially for someone so associated with hallucinogenics and psychedelic enlightenment. But despite being tee-total for over twenty-one years Cope fell off the wagon, so to speak, when he was undertaking some research in Armenia in 2003. In one village the locals put on a big feast in honour of the Arch Drude, and despite him telling his translator he was tee-total, he was advised, Cope now says half-jokingly, he would be "lynched" if he didn't accept their hospitality. He subsequently ended up downing nine double mulberry

vodkas and, in his own words, ended up "raging!". Since then he hasn't looked back, and has developed something of a penchant for beer, which, along with "more beer", is apparently his tippie of choice these days. One of the main inspirations for the album itself is a song worthy of accompanying a full display of "gnashing of teeth" and "rending of garments" he wrote for his own funeral called 'As The Beer Flows Over Me'. 'Liver Big As A Hartlepool' is a wry pun on his old Liverpool chum Pete Wylie's song 'Heart Big As Liverpool'. It's also a tribute to his once adopted city. Other titles like 'Clonakilty As Charged' and 'Don't Drink And Drive You Might Spill Some' also demonstrate Cope hasn't lost his sense of humour, whilst the final track is an epic nineteen-minute tale about a journey in which two dissolute friends make their drunken way from Dingle Bay to Tralee for a stag night. Heady stuff indeed!

Armed with just himself, his songs, stories and mellotrons, Cope heads out on the road this February for the accompanying tour, and has intimated that he'll be including the old 'Teardrops Explodes' song, 'Passionate Friend' in the set. One might wonder what other surprises the live sets will hold. Julian Cope has never really claimed to be all things to all people, and indeed there are some people he probably really irritates the hell out of – but few could fail to be endeared to some aspect or other of his persona. Cope's endeavours as a solo musician, writer, political and social activist, as well as cultural commentator since the early '90s may now have arguably eclipsed the fame and notoriety he gained during the early part of his career... if not in terms of commerciality, then at least in terms of audacity, eccentricity and sheer outspoken outlandishness. Even if people have long stopped referring to him as just another rock 'n' roll acid casualty, one thing is for sure, Cope's place in the pantheon of great rock 'n' roll eccentrics is fully deserved – and he is rightfully acknowledged as one of Albion's respected alternative musical institutions. There's no denying the Arch Drude is a cult of the highest order.

'Drunken Songs' is out now on Head Heritage



#### RECOMMENDED

##### 'Peggy Suicide'

Released: 1990

Label: Island

Recorded by Hugo Nicolson

Players: Julian Cope (vocals/guitar/synth), Donald Ross Skinner (bass/guitar/organ), Michael Watts (guitar), Ron Fair (piano), G.S. Butterworth (synth), Mark Cosby (drums), Mike Joyce (guest drums), J.D. Hassinger (electronic drums), Ronnie Ross (saxophone), Aaf Verkade (trumpet), Dan Levett (cello)