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# FREE TO 1





# BE STONED!

**Alcohol, Albert Hofmann's "problem child",  
Aldous Huxley's "first love" and marijuana.**

**Mick Hutchinson of lysergic rockers  
CLARK-HUTCHINSON gives RICH DEAKIN the  
inside dope on music, booze, cycling, LSD and  
THC in no particular order.**

**F**or the uninitiated, Clark Hutchinson recorded a trio of albums for the Decca/Deram/Nova stables between 1969 and '71 – four if you include their *Blues* album, unreleased at the time. Lauded by John Peel and Miles of the underground newspaper

*International Times*, anyone who read the hype surrounding Clark Hutchinson could be forgiven for thinking that the new saviours of rock 'n' roll had been discovered, albeit suffused with hints of jazz, flamenco and Indian ragas. That their LPs were received with only a modicum of success confirms that they failed to live up to their expectations, commercially at least. This, however, is certainly no reflection on their musical prowess. Andy Clark was a talented multi-instrumentalist adept at playing organ, saxophone, bass, guitar, flute, harmonica, percussion and bagpipes, whilst guitarist Mick Hutchinson received the kind of plaudits usually reserved for guitar maestros like Hendrix, Clapton or Beck. With comparisons to Django Reinhardt and predictions that Hutchinson would be a guitar legend within two years of releasing their debut album, it seemed that the world was Clark Hutchinson's for the taking. So why didn't it happen?

Like so many bands and musicians of their era, they eventually disintegrated amidst a welter of spiralling drink and drug use. But first we pick up the story in the mid-60s soon after Mick Hutchinson had played in a mod influenced R&B/beat combo called The Sons Of Fred who released a string of singles between '65 and '66. Prior to being in The Sons Of Fred even, Hutchinson had nurtured an interest in the musical styles of India and the East, "I used to tune the 3rd string down to D and play it like a sitar." So when he was introduced to an exceptional tabla player called Sam Gopal, he jumped at the chance to play with him.

Perhaps more famously, they even played at that most epochal of British counterculture happenings – The 14 Hour Technicolor Dream at The Alexandra Palace in April '67. It was around this time that Mick Hutchinson was staying at the Middle Earth club in Covent Garden. In his own words, he'd been thrown out of home for being a "filthy hippy". "I didn't have anywhere to go, so they let me live in the club, which was nice of them. Pete [Sears] and I used to stay in there and get completely fucked. We sometimes used to borrow Graham Bond's Hammond organ and jam all night!" Then Hutchinson had a chance encounter with a kindred spirit called Andy Clark at a bus stop. Both had long hair so they struck up conversation

L to R: Mick Hutchinson, Andy Clark, Del Coverley, Steve Fields

and it turned out that they were both musicians with shared interests.

It wasn't long before Clark joined Sam Gopal's Dream as vocalist, but the partnership with Gopal came to an end after legendary hell-raiser and ex-Pretty Things drummer, Viv Prince, joined. In addition to management issues, it soon became apparent that Viv's drums and Sam's tablas weren't compatible, and Viv, Andy, Mick and Pete left Gopal to form

Sippen persuaded Clark and Hutchinson to sign for them after much cajoling with cannabis, and also on the understanding that they would produce a blues LP together, before making an Indian influenced one.

With a little help from Seymour Stein, Shertser and Sippen negotiated a deal with Decca Records in the UK, and reconvened to Decca's West Hampstead Studios with the, by now, renamed Clark

don't believe in regretting things. Chas Chandler asked me if I wanted to try out on bass for Hendrix. I don't regret turning that one down either." Then in May '69, having dispensed with the rhythm section that backed them on *Blues*, Clark Hutchinson were booked into Recorded Sound Studios to work on their next album, and gamely tackled all the instruments between them in two 12-hour sessions. Still smarting about the disagreement over *Blues*, it was all that Decca allowed them. At least they were afforded the relative luxury of an eight-track studio for the entire recording this time, and they produced what is now generally regarded as their *tour de force* album – the legendary *A=MH2*. Suffused throughout with a range of global musical influences as diverse as Arabic, Indian, Spanish and blues-rock, *A=MH2* was a truly innovative fusion of Eastern and Western musical styles – it even has a bagpipe chanter on it! Although it was certainly not unheard of for western folk and rock musicians to experiment with Indian musical styles at that time, when Peter Shertser today describes *A=MH2* as "the first true 'world music' album by a rock band", he may have a point.

Today, Mick Hutchinson says that *A=MH2* is not the album it should have been.

"Mixing it with jazz, blues and sort of Bachy things, *A=MH2* doesn't really reflect all of it. It was much more complex than that. With *A=MH2* we were just told to go in and make an album – quick. No time to stop or plan, just do it. So *A=MH2* is what happened. 'Improvisation On An Indian Scale', in particular, is nowhere *near* what I could do. It had some of the techniques, like the pedal tone fast picking thing that all the metal bands do now, and all the fast runs, but it doesn't hold together. It's scrappy. Now, if we could have recorded the best bits of The Sam Gopal Dream, it would have showed something a lot more like I'm doing today!" At least he is not totally self-deprecating, though, stating, "The rest of the album tracks hold up much better."

There was a considerable delay between the recording of the album and its eventual release in January '70, but if nothing else, this gave Clark and Hutchinson plenty of time to recruit a new rhythm section. Playing all the instruments in a recording studio may have been one thing, but they needed a band if they were to promote *A=MH2* by playing live. Employing the talents of a drummer, Del Coverley, and bass player Steve Fields (AKA Amazing Stephen Amazing), the newly upgraded duo set about taking their own brand of blues-jazz-raga eclecticism on the road. No one Clark Hutchinson gig was the same and

"We played one night in Glasgow where we put all the instruments completely out of tune and did monster music. The promoter said he couldn't have us back because he'd never seen a band so fucked!"

another short-lived outfit called Vamp. They released one single on Atlantic, the marijuana-influenced 'Floating'. Hutchinson was never happy with the final result. "They tried to turn us into The Monkees... They didn't understand that the hippie psychedelic thing was happening. 'Floating' is about pot." Hutchinson also infers that Viv Prince's increasingly erratic behaviour also contributed to the demise of Vamp.

With Sears leaving to play with Steamhammer, Clark and Hutchinson formed a blues group called The Dogs. They attracted the attention of two aspiring music entrepreneurs, Peter Shertser and Ian Sippen, who signed them to their fledgling production company Underground Recording Enterprises. Prior to becoming involved in the music business Shertser and Sippen had a reputation as being part of a gang of Jewish mods from Essex called The Firm. They had cut their teeth on the music scene variously as roadies for bands like Savoy Brown, and, perhaps more famously, helping with the production, distribution and release of the first truly underground record *Ptooff!* by The Deviants. Not only that, they licensed *Ptooff!* to the nascent Sire Records in the US, whose owner Seymour Stein also gave them the task of finding and producing more English talent for him. According to Hutchinson, "They seemed intent on living their lives as close as possible to being in a Marx Brothers movie. The Marx Brothers were their role models." However, Shertser and

Hutchinson to record the mooted "blues" album. Aided and abetted by Walter Monahan and Franco Franco, it is an album of heavy guitar blues as exemplified by the likes of Led Zeppelin, Groundhogs and Fleetwood Mac to name a few. When asked if he thought that if Decca had actually released *Blues* in '69 and promoted it properly, Clark Hutchinson might have capitalised on the blues-rock boom then currently in vogue, Hutchinson responds, "Maybe if we had redone it, but it's just nowhere near as good as we could do, so it's not really representative." But it does have its fair share of moments though, the most notable of which being the wistful 'Summer Seemed Longer'. Not ranking too highly in the pecking order of Decca's roster of artists, the quality of the recording suffered when Clark Hutchinson were demoted from the 8-track studio to a 4-track. If Decca also objected to the finished product on the grounds of one track in particular called 'Make You' (originally called 'Fuck You'), then the band were just as unhappy with the finished product. Hutchinson recalls, "It was just a sort of demo. There's no reverb on it so it's a bit harsh sounding. We would have preferred to redo it."

Having already turned down offers to join The Moody Blues a couple of years previously, it was around this time that Hutchinson was courted by Jon Hiseman's Colosseum. He turned them down too because musically they weren't sufficiently oriented towards "The East", so to speak. Today there are no regrets, "I





more often than not they were anarchic affairs. Today Mick Hutchinson comments on what a typical set circa '70 consisted of: "Improvisation on songs. Completely improvised jazz, funk. Atonal insanity, but with a strong rhythm. Reggae, long Indian influenced pieces. Every gig different! We played one night in Glasgow where we put all the instruments completely out of tune and did monster music. I played the whole set lying on my back in the middle of the audience. It went down a riot, but the promoter said he couldn't have us back because he'd never seen a band so fucked! Other nights we'd play stuff that Count Basie might like."

Clark Hutchinson were already immersed in the trappings of the British

underground scene by the time they took to the road in '70 to promote *A=MH2*, and that summer they also played a number of festivals including Phun City with the likes of MC5 and The Pink Fairies, as well as the usual benefit gigs usually associated with dyed-in-the wool underground bands. Retaining the services of Coverley and Amazing, they had by now started to record their second official album. As if confirming their underground credentials, they had written a defiant freak anthem called 'Free To Be Stoned' – a relentless Hendrix-style heavy rocker that epitomises the "fuck you" anything goes attitude of the counterculture. *Retribution* was as different an album as you could imagine from the Indian raga-style

inflections of *A=MH2*, and although the pre-*A=MH2* blues influences were still in evidence, it marked a move to more traditional heavy-rock, with the exception of 'After Hours', a 10-minute blues-jazz jam that conjures up images of a smoke-filled bar in New Orleans. Hutchinson, however, still harboured more grandiose musical plans and it wasn't long before tensions between band and management arose.

Hutchinson now recounts, "I wanted to get the band all together in one place and write music. There was an argument about money. There was an advance from Decca. Shertser and Sippen were spending it just like Smarties. The way they were carrying on there would have been no money left

even to pay the rent! I wanted to rent a house in the country and write music. I would have liked a Mellotron to get string section sounds. I had the idea of combining the Indian improvisation with classical and jazz chord structures. That didn't happen. They completely refused to discuss how the money should be spent or how the band could get together and write and rehearse."

Their relationship with Sippen soured in particular. Increasing chemical consumption by both parties presumably added to this atmosphere of distrust, and, inevitably, something had to give. Sippen was sacked. Although exasperated by the atmosphere of distrust that had built up

threesome with Del Coverley again, and recruited a new producer, Colin Couldwell. Like *Retribution* and *A=MH2* before it, *Gestalt* marked a significant departure from its predecessor. Whereas the songs on *Retribution* had a certain sense of humour running through them, an air of melancholy seems to have crept in on *Gestalt*. It appears more reflective lyrically, and in terms of music it is probably the most stylistically diverse collection of songs Clark Hutchinson did. Apart from the two main heavy rockers 'Man's Best Friend' and 'Poison', elsewhere the Indian influences that characterised the guitar rages on *A=MH2* have crept back in, whilst jazzier influences are also given freer reign, be

and Hutchinson went their separate ways. Soon after this, Hutchinson went on to play guitar on Pete Brown's '72 album, *Two Heads Are Better Than One*, before forcing himself into self-imposed exile from the music business for the sake of his health. His drinking by then was so excessive that he once told Phil McMullen of *Ptolemaic Terrascope*, "I was drinking 15 pints of lager with a treble scotch in each every day for six months." Not surprisingly for an unreconstituted hippy, he is an avowed advocate of psychedelics and has since said, "However, Albert Hoffman's problem child was always kind to me – as was Aldous Huxley's first love – they helped me a lot, especially recovering from all that booze. I was ill for a while. Since then I've

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between them, Shertser remained with the band until his production duties for *Retribution* were fulfilled.

On its release in October '70, *Retribution* was greeted with even less commercial success than *A=MH2*. By now Clark Hutchinson's intake of booze and drugs had become quite monumental. Hutchinson recalls, "We did *Retribution* and I had two plain clothes policemen sitting outside my flat because of 'Free To Be Stoned'. I had to move away. I got pissed off and got pissed! The band was getting into alcohol so I just went along with it. I mean if you are going to behave like an idiot you might as well do it properly! I never had problems with drugs. Alcohol doesn't agree with me, same as tobacco. I didn't want to play in smoky places... I don't remember much about recording *Retribution* at all. The only reason I know I'm on it is because I'm on the front cover! Timothy Leary said that all the things in his life that he most regretted, he had done were under the influence of alcohol... I'll go along with that one!"

It would be a year before their next album, *Gestalt*. Having since parted company with Peter Shertser and Stephen Amazing, Clark Hutchinson tackled instrumental duties as a

they the more conventional piano and guitar number 'Come Up Here', or the free-form 'Disorientated Parts One And Two'. Andy Clark's vocal range is as versatile as ever, tackling the more reflective slower songs with heartfelt emotion, or the more heavy numbers, such as 'Poison', with gravel-throated passion. 'Poison' is also significant in that it was an early environmental song at a time when such sentiments were still generally regarded as being the preserve of a few crackpot lefties or far-out hippies. Somewhat vindicated today, Hutchinson still has little time for politicians and stands by many of the values espoused by the counterculture at that time: "The Hippies were right, the system is shit. Politicians are wankers!.. The psychedelic era was the beginning of the investigation of the nature of consciousness for many people. In my opinion that is the true legacy of the '60s and the only real hope for a peaceful world."

Although *Gestalt* was possibly Clark Hutchinson's most accessible effort to date, it again failed to chart. The drinking and drugging hadn't abated by the time it was released in November '71 either. Today Mick Hutchinson says, "Here and there, in a few places it does show that you *can* overdo the marijuana." Inevitably Clark

been vegetarian and cycled everywhere. It might seem strange, but I could see all the hard drugs coming and I wanted no part of all that crap."

Although they parted amicably enough, until 2007, *Gestalt* was the last time Clark Hutchinson played together. Sadly, one-time bassist Stephen Amazing has since died, but in the meantime Del Coverley has played with numerous bands over the years, including Carl Douglas of 'Kung Fu Fighting' fame. Andy Clark went on to forge a career as a respected session musician. Playing with artists as diverse as Miles Davis's wife Betty, Desmond Dekker, Roy Gaines, Mike Oldfield, The Gap Band, Toyah, and David Bowie on his *Scary Monsters* LP to name a few. Clark also played in a number of other bands along the way, including Upp with Jeff Beck, Be Bop Deluxe and Red Noise with Bill Nelson and also electro-funkers The Rah Band, who had a hit in '77 with 'The Crunch'. Wrestling with a number of personal demons throughout the '80s and '90s, Clark finally beat his addiction to heroin – the song 'One Wrong Step', originally written back in the '80s, relates to his battle with drugs. After working sporadically over the years with his old band mate Sam Gopal, Andy and Sam finally recorded a new album together called *Father Mucker* in June '99. Since the



'90s, Andy has contributed orchestral work to the theatre and also appeared with Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick and Titch, as well as Pete Doherty.

Mick Hutchinson withdrew altogether from the music business for a number of years and worked in a bicycle warehouse. Initially, he took up cycling as a means of distraction from the excesses of alcohol and the rock 'n' roll lifestyle, but it became an integral part of his life and today he is still a keen cyclist. Similarities abound here with Pink Fairies and Hawkwind guitarist Paul Rudolph. Perhaps there was something about cycling that disillusioned guitarists found therapeutic in the early '70s? "Eric Clapton, Steve Vai. I think it's a bit of a Yin Yang balance type thing. It sort of balances out the music... Cycling seems to sort your brain out. All that booze left it a bit wobbly. Long distance cycling – 70-100 miles or more – has a psychedelic effect on the mind too... Long distance cycling sort of trips you out!"

Remaining musically inactive for the best part of the next two decades, Hutchinson reappeared in '98 to release *Eclectic*, as Mick Hutchinson & Magic Dragon. *Eclectic* at the same time built upon the foundations laid by *A=MH2* 30 years earlier, as well as marking a new beginning for Hutchinson. Combining as it does Eastern influences and more modern techno in places, it's not too hard to imagine Steve Hillage's System 7 doing something similar. At other times it might as easily be edgy soundtrack music for an atmospheric thriller.

Music videos posted on YouTube and various other web pages bear testimony to the fact that Hutchinson has been very prolific musically in the years since *Eclectic*, and some new exclusive preview tracks show that Hutchinson still isn't afraid of diversifying. 'Demons Of The Brown', for example, is an anti-heroin instrumental interspersed with deeply growled spoken vocals, and combines Metallica-like heavy guitar riffing with Indian influenced psychedelia. It is a direction Hutchinson hopes to continue with the reformed Clark Hutchinson – a reunion that that was originally mooted in the '80s, but after many distractions later, finally came to fruition at the end of 2007 and has since resulted in Clark Hutchinson, including Del Coverley, reconvening at Mick's home studio to record a song for a forthcoming Deviants and Pink Fairies tribute CD. The last word goes to Mick Hutchinson: "We are having a serious reunion – more videos, an instrumental album, a single and several more songs in the pipeline... We plan to do some gigs when we get some music finished." 

