

So how did *your* great love affair with music begin? Each issue we give **R2**'s writers a chance to share *their* version of an age old story ...

# It started with a **DISC**

**M**y musical education started earlier than many, as I was the youngest in a large family, by nine years; my sister and brothers were less like siblings than 'aunt' and 'uncles'. For one naturally inclined towards music, they offered the opportunity to absorb influences well beyond my years. Very soon I moved away from *The Mike Sammes Singers Present Songs From The Jungle Book* (one of Music For Pleasure's finest) to rather more eclectic tastes.

From my sister came a fondness for classic 60s pop; from my eldest brother: classical music, The Beatles and singer-songwriters. But it was from Brian, my nearest sibling, that seeds of a love for rock were sown. His expanding record collection already ranged from Hendrix, Zeppelin and The Who to Horslips, Rory Gallagher, and the Doobies – all of which I absorbed with gusto. However, it was in 1978 when my first musical epiphany occurred. A moment when music changed from being akin to oxygen – completely essential yet so omnipresent as to be invisible – to something more special; a divine fragrance. Brian returned from Truro with a plastic bag clutched under his arm, the swirly 70s logo 'Saffron Records' promising excitement. "Come and have a listen to this ..."

The cover that emerged from the plastic shroud was revelation enough: a luxurious black highlighted by a pair of mirrored shades that actually reflected the light from the window. There was a legend – *Fear Of The Dark* – and then, in futuristic lettering, the name 'Gordon Giltrap': Nope, never heard of him. As the Dansette needle hit the groove, recognition stirred. An urgent, insistent and unfeasibly intricate acoustic guitar riff issued from the speakers, driven forward by manic percussion. As the rest of the band kicked in, I tentatively asked, "Is this the bloke from that *Holiday* programme on telly?" A sudden fill, which rolled right around the drum kit, confirmed that indeed it was he.

As an increasingly music obsessed pre-

teen my only interest in that particular programme was in its opening thirty or forty seconds – 'Heartsong', with its joyfully strummed acoustic guitar intro and characteristic drum fill (so integral that it formed the centre-piece of any attempt to hum the tune). The knowledge that it had been performed by a 'proper' rock musician and wasn't just some thirty-second jingle was a second revelation.

Giltrap had cut his teeth fifteen years earlier, emulating his heroes Davy Graham and Bert Jansch as a singer-songwriter on the burgeoning 1960s London folk-club scene. As the 1970s dawned he set aside vocal work, concentrating on his unique acoustic guitar style. However, 1976 saw a further change in direction with the release of *Visionary*, an album inspired by the mystic artist-philosopher, William Blake. Using a full rock band and layering on orchestral textures, *Visionary* and follow-up, *Perilous Journey*, paved the way for the prog-folk magnificence of *Fear Of The Dark*.

For the twenty-one minutes it had taken for the needle to traverse side one I was transfixed. The intricacy and brooding menace of the music rose and fell like the waves on some unimaginably wide ocean but this was no seaside special. Over the coming months, whenever Brian left the house, I would sneak the album out of his room and down to the lounge where the enhanced quality of my father's Grundig hi-fi and a pair of all-enveloping Phillips headphones allowed me to immerse myself in the music completely.

Eyes tightly closed, I'd lie on my back on the thick carpet, or stare at the creepily dissected fresnel-lens image of the guitarist that the gatefold sleeve revealed. Thus obsession, cemented some months later when Westward Television screened a – now long-lost – film 'interpreting' the album. Images of Tintagel castle, beautiful maidens gossamer-clad like refugees from a Pan's People photo-shoot, and some surreal set-pieces – all burned the evocative nature of the music further into my teenage subconscious.

Only later did I develop a deeper appreciation of the album's technical accomplishments. The final instalment in a musical trilogy, it featured not only Giltrap's distinctive, virtuosic guitar playing but also a stellar group of studio musicians. The recording's captivating percussion was provided by a still-teenage Simon Phillips, years from recognition as one of the drum world's true gods but no less talented, musical or tasteful. The flowing and lyrical playing of Caravan bassist, John G Perry, a stalwart of the Canterbury progressive scene, inculcated a love of bass guitar that would, a few years later, lead to my own involvement in folk and rock bands. And those were but two of the first-rate British musicians passing through the ranks of Giltrap's band: others included Roxy Music bassist John Gustafson, Jethro Tull's Clive Bunker and Ian Moseley from Marillion.

As the 1980s dawned, the economics of keeping a band together in the changing music scene of the time put paid to the symphonic nature of Giltrap's recorded output. He reverted to the formula developed as a youth – the lone acoustic troubadour. It's a role that Giltrap still performs along the length and breadth of the UK. Thirty years on, his music continues to captivate me, in concert and on record, though none more so than my initial experience of *Fear Of The Dark*.

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