

It Bites

MAP OF THE PAST



"It Bites is a band that started in England in 1984 and sort of best known for one song basically in England, a song called Calling all the Heroes. They started out an out-and-out pop band like Duran Duran but then for the next album Once Around the World they sort of outed themselves as massive prog rockers which probably came as a bit of a chock to the record company, they were on a major label at the time called Virgin Records. They did that album and then the following album they did was like a straight ahead rock album in a bid to break the american market but, you know. Then after that in about 1990 the original lead singer left and that was the end of the group apparently everyone thought. Until about 2006 when I was asked to join so I joined them in 2006 and we did an album called The Tall Ships (2008) and then four years later we've done another one and that is pretty much a condensed history of It Bites."



WRITTEN BY DANIEL KÄLLMALM
PHOTOS: PRESS PHOTOS, AS CREDITED
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The opening phrase is how singer, songwriter, guitarist and whatever else he is up to in the band, John Mitchell who is also known from things like Arena, The Urbane, Kino to name a few, retells the story of It Bites. And

why not as that is about all the most important events from their career condensed into a few sentences but sure there are more to this band as well and with their fifth studio album following their critically acclaimed "Tall Ships" they are looking to conquer the world with their new offering "Map of the Past" which is the first ever concept album by It Bi-

tes. It is a story inspired by an old photograph.

- It was a picture of my great grand parents in 1913 and it is in front of an old farm building in Cornwall in the south of England. I saw this picture and it was kind of spooky looking, it was sepia coloured, sort of yellowy and it was faded at the edges and I was kind of fascinated.

This fascination comes from one man in the photograph, a man who does not really appear to belong in this picture as unlike all the other characters who are looking into the camera as was customary when taking photographs in the past he was facing away like he didn't want to be there in the picture.

- He was on the left hand side,

it was my great grandfather in the front, his sister and some people in a horse drawn carriage and everyone was looking at the camera. Apart from this one guy on the left who was on this horseback and he was dressed in military clothing and he is deliberately facing away from the camera which was kind of a strange picture really. And it kind of called

my imagination.

John explains that he does visit Cornwall regularly and goes there sailing sometimes and when returning from such a trip he went on in search for the place of the photograph. This is not as futile as it might sound as the old farm building is not just a random place to John, he knew roughly where to find it and so he did.



Photo by Lee Blackmore

- I went along this little road with lots of trees, it was very narrow and lots of leaves everywhere and I turned a corner and there it was right in front of me and it was exactly like driving back into the picture because the building hadn't changed at all, it was bizarre. The only thing that had changed in a hundred years was that the people wasn't in the picture, obviously they have all passed on by now, it was quite a chock to me how little it had changed.

John had been growing up with this picture but when his parents past while he still was very young, the picture disappeared from his mind and when he was given it from his cousin it brought back memories of his past and that thing sparked his imagination and he set out to write this story.

- I kind of wrote a story about a guy who tries to change his present, certain aspects of his life by altering things that happened in previous generations and that is

kind of the basic premise of the story.

Writing a story

Trying to change aspects of ones life by altering previous events sounds a bit like time travel, and that is in a sense what it is about but maybe not quite in the general literary view of time travel but more in a diffuse and vague sense. There is no time machine involved and events are triggered by the subconscious mind and the dreams seems to be the key to

the story.

- It's kind of in his mind, it's his subconscious imagining. He tries to change things and unravel things and only makes them worse, and eventually he just gets stuck there when he can't come back and he becomes part of the picture.

Which makes the story possibly about the futility of changing events to make ones own existence better even though certain key events are changed and we can hear in the *Exit Song* about

one rather small historical event that is changed, I will not tell you which because John didn't tell me and after all interviews are to promote artists and what better way to promote an album that curiosity? And a lot of attention was put into telling this story and not just make another progressive rock- or concept album and everything was thought about very carefully to make sure that it was told just right.

- We were very careful to make sure that each song had its exact

place on the album, all the lyrics referenced each other. There's a scene at the front of the album with the radio and the radio comes back and it turns out that the guy has disappeared into the annuals of history but has changed certain key events in history.

And the writing process for this album also meant that they did use all the songs that they wrote for the album, there was no discarding of songs that otherwise is usually the case, everything was used, they didn't waste anything



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as John says.

- We didn't write any more or any less, all the ones that we wrote are the ones that appear on the album.

Scoring a story

Out of these storytelling songs,

there are one that for John stands out a little bit extra and it is a song that he keeps referring to throughout the entire interview we did for this article. It a track that was written by John Beck the band's keyboard player who generally according to John Mitchell is very

good at arranging music but generally not that keen on writing any. But he had two songs that he had demoed up and everything and those are the two favourite tracks on the album according to John.

- On this occasion he comple-

tely surprised me, he brought two bits of music to the album which had been writing at home and recorded them, demoed them up at home and they were the tracks *Send No Flowers* and *Meadow and the Stream* and they run into each other. They were the most recent things that we recorded and the things I love the most, they are overly theatrical and I just thought they were so over the top, not ridiculous in a bad way but ridiculous in a fun way and they sparked my imagination. I love them, they are my two favourite tracks on the album.

These are according to John though as already touched upon not the normal way for It Bites to write their music because normally it starts with ideas from John Mitchell and then John Beck (lots of Johns there) makes arrangements for them, often the phrase "okay, what do you got?" is spoken apparently.

- Normally John would sit opposite me in a room with his keyboard and I sit with the guitar, and he sits there with his arms folded and says "okay, what do you got?" It's always down to me to come up with the first thing, which I do, and then we'll argue about what the drum beat should be.

And after that a lot of guide instruments are recorded and the lyrics has to be written quickly and that has to be recorded and the rhythm section like the drums and bass are added as the last parts and when all of the guides are finished then the pieces are given to the others to make out their overdubs, and it is only John and John Beck that writes the music.

- We don't kind of write as such in a room with everybody all

jamming together or anything. It is just John and I and then we give the songs to other people to work out there own parts.

And it would have appeared to have paid off if we are to believe what John thinks as he rates this as the album he is most proud of from everything he has been involved with in regards to writing, recording and singing. For him it is personal in so many ways, with the idea being sparked by a photo and how that intertwines with his own life and also how he worked alongside the guy doing the artwork to make sure that the pages for each song in the booklet ended up the way he wanted and he had a mission to make this album as a bit of a journey in a musical sense.

- he whole thing sort of works together and I think when listening to it that it stands really well together as an album, it sort of takes you on a bit of a journey and that is the thing I set out to achieve. And I am very pleased, I don't think there's a weak song in it and I like it for some quite interesting instrumental passages that I am very proud of and that we worked on quite hard, and hopefully everyone agrees.

From the little I have been able to gather in terms of reviews on the internet it would seem like he has the right to be proud as the album has gotten some fine reviews and I haven't seen anything negative, and that would seem to agree with what John has heard from people who has heard the album already as it is yet to be released, tomorrow seen from the publishing date of this article and some week or so later than the interview. Which is why we have to wait a while for fan reactions something that John hopes will be good.

- I have tried to put more of my own stamp on it and make it sound a bit more of myself. So, I

think that so far we have had a very good reaction and hopefully when it gets released the public at large will agree.

Although for fans to be able to comment and react to the album there has to be some buying said album and for that to happen there has to be some buzz or interest around the album and as far as John can gather from the band's interactive presence there is some great interest from the band's active fan community.

- I think everybody has been preordering it like mad and I think that it's going to be a bit of a nice surprise to the people when it finally is released.

Promoting a Story

Touring is sort of the thing it seems like every band wants to do when releasing an album, the goal is always a grande tour all over the place for most people though the reality of economy dictates that it is not possible. It Bites hopes to stretch a bit further and to conquer someplace other than only the UK and they are discussing a possible tour of mainland Europe with the label although there is nothing in terms of such things confirmed or really on the cards right now as the dates that are marked in the calendar of this band takes them to a few places in the UK where they have reached quite well and the same goes for Japan but those are the only places this band has really been big.

- It Bites really only had a big audience in the UK and in Japan but with this album I think we want to take a reach a bit further outfield because I don't think It Bites ever did much effort back in the 80s when Francis Durnery was in the band to tour Europe and other places. With that in mind I think this time around we're going to make a bit more effort to do so.

But as I stated already the only dates that are confirmed at the moment are four dates come may and some festivals like Cambridge Rock Festival and Celebrate Festival in London, but you have to update yourselves on when and where they are from the band's website as we can't write it here and for the latest updates on tours and everything else I would recommend the band's website. Imagine the possibilities for building interesting live sets for touring this album.

It is difficult to end a story

But now let us tie it all together with some more about "Map

of the Past" and the ridiculous works of It Bites, ridiculous in a fun way of course and not in the other regard. I leave to John to explain why the word ridiculous is so widely used by this band.

- I like that word, I don't mean it in a negative detrimental way. In English it's, we kind of use it to describe things that are over the top, it is an adjective to describe something that is quite ludicrously larger than life, that's the word I use to describe *Send no Flowers* because it starts out like with a sort of church organ and than it turns into this ridiculous, it is the only word I can use to describe it when the orchestra comes in that

John Beck lovingly put together and I play cello on it and violin and it comes crashing in and it is so much louder than the rest of the track. Every time I hear it it makes me smile because it is over the top to the maximum and that is one of the things I wanted this album to be. If you listen to *Bohemian Rhapsody*, I am not comparing by any stretch of the imagination but if you listen to *Bohemian Rhapsody* and that whole middle section comes in, it can only be described as ridiculous because it is so over the top.

And over the top, not quite taking it all too seriously is something this band are proud of

being as it sets them a bit apart from most other progressive rock bands out there today, and also that they do make a different kind of concept album.

- I mean typically concept albums are supposed to be dark, bruited, pompous and to be honest with you I am quite pleased with this one because I like to think that some of the music is quite joyous actually even though there are some darker moments on the album.

Besides ridiculous, words like escapism and otherworldliness are used in relation to this band and that is something that is important to this band. John thinks

that the music should not be as ordinary as the lives most of us have to endure, it should take you places, evoke emotional response or whatever. He does not agree with some people's notion that music is art but he says that music should be entertainment and this entertainment can be about escapism which often is an important part of progressive rock and a part of the genre that John agrees with. He also believes that most modern progressive rock takes itself very seriously and there is no real room for humour, it is just gloomy, dark and serious which is something It Bites isn't.

- With *Send No Flowers* for ex-

ample, I keep referencing that song, because even if it seems quite ominous and dark there is a definite undercurrent of humour in it and I miss that, I think that Genesis always had that and there was sort of elements of definite tongue in cheekness about it. Whereas a lot of progressive rock bands these days takes it all very, very, very earnest and serious.

So, It Bites are on the lighter side of progressive rock then?

- Yeah, I think so, It Bites started out as a pop band so, in the same vein as, I don't know, 10CC or something where they did have a definite sense of humour in the music. John replies laughingly.



Photo by Lee...



But being different is nothing that is really in the cards for this band to set out to be, it just gets that way for them.

- I think that when you think about music too much that's when it becomes, you know. You can't select to write music it either happens or it doesn't.

And with this new album it happened in a way that John took on his role more as his own in the band rather than just filling someone else's shoes like it sort of was with his first album with

It Bites called "Tall Ships" where they really focused on making music that sounded like It Bites, this time it is more personal and more of his own touch and that is one of the best things about the album according to John.

- The best thing about it is, I don't know, the fact that it is personal. Even though it is a concept album that tells a story about something else, the thing that I feel connected to it is the best thing about it. And being someone who stepped into another person's

shoes in a band, it was not my band to begin with it was somebody else's band, it is something I feel linked with in this band more than perhaps the last album did and I feel like having done it it makes me feel more connected with the band having done this album because it's got more of my own personality in it.

And now let me remind you that the "Map of the Past" album is out on the 26th of march which is more or less today and be sure to check in on the band's web-

site to get the latest information on tours and everything that we haven't written about them. With that I leave a final word to John Mitchell and thanks him for taking his time to speak with us.

- Just go and buy the album really, and if you like it then that's mission succeeded and if you don't like it don't come out and tell me about it because I am very sensitive.

It Bites are:

John Mitchell - L. Vocals, Guitars
John Beck - Keyboards, Vocals
Bob Dalton - Drums, Vocals
Lee Pomeroy - Bass, Vocals

It Bites Discography:

The Big Lad In The Windmill(86)
Once Around The World (1988)
Eat Me In St. Louis (1989)
The Tall Ships (2008)
Map of the Past (2012)

It Bites on the web:

Our review
<http://itbites.com/>
It bites myspace
It Bites on InsideOut