

The
Debutantes
ANTHOLOGY

Some Memories...

I started to write this history thinking I could just reel of all the notable events in no time at all. I pretty quickly realised that I have forgotten practically all the details of the time, although speaking to the other guys I'm certainly not alone on that score. I'll put it down to the ravages of time and the somewhat excessive indulgences of the period...

My last band Down had split up in the summer of 1995. I tried to get another band going the following year, which featured Barry Taylor (from Down) on bass, Ian Studd on drums, Mark Adams on guitar and Carol Turner on piano, but after a few rehearsals it petered out. Around the same period, another local band Afro had also split up.

Afro was the band of my friend and former flat-mate Pete Rowe, and featured Reece Fairfield on vocals, formerly of HipDiRoc (a local band I regularly watched in the early 90s). I used to drive Afro to gigs in my van until the bastards decided paying me petrol money was stupid and



got their own van instead. But they were a big influence on me - they actually had some real musical ability, unlike my earlier bands - and I hugely admired Reece as a great front-man. He was basically everything I wasn't as a front-man... charismatic, engaging and a very good singer. Reece started another band called Robinson, but that was pretty short-lived too. I remember chatting to him and him telling me that he'd had enough of bands and was going to give music a break. I thought this was crazy - Reece was way too talented to jack it all in, and I thought about trying to get a band together with him, but I never thought he'd want to work with me. After all, he'd seen my band Down a couple of times. Nevertheless, after a little persuading, we agreed to have a jam and see what happened.

The first time we got together was around Christmas 1996. We had a couple of jams in an old stable block in Puttenham (since renovated - our old rehearsal room is now Reece's bedroom!) with my friend Barry Taylor on bass, and tried two different drummers - Ian Studd and Alan Thorne. Al and Reece went way back having played together in HipDiRoc. I think we worked a little with both of them early on, before settling with Al on a permanent basis. Nothing is ever very permanent with Al though, and Ian subsequently became involved again further down the track.

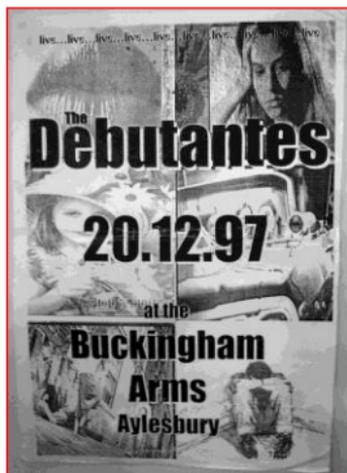
I'm not sure when Sparky (David Watts) arrived on the scene as our keyboard player, but it was pretty early on in the proceedings. I don't even know where he came from. As far as I'm aware, he just sort of materialised in our rehearsal room and was with us every week thereafter. I suspect it was a chance meeting with Reece that brought him in, as I don't recall us ever advertising for a keyboard player. Either way, early in 1997 we had a full band and began to get a set together. On the face of it Sparky seemed like an unlikely Debutante, but he was a top musician and a thoroughly lovely guy - and by far the most musically educated of the group.

Most of the early songs we did tended to be re-workings of old ideas. We worked on songs that had been part of the Afro catalogue, such as *Story* and *Waster*, and some other ideas of Reece's including a song called *Short Short Life* that finally appeared in the Debutantes set many years later as *Starchaser*. Billy came from Reece's time with Robinson. Other tracks I vaguely recall include *Mary Lou* and *Obvious/Interesting*.

I'd never actually co-written songs with anyone before, but Reece and I started to write songs together, which was something of a revelation for me. Genuine co-writing too - we'd sit down together, work on a (usually very rough) idea that one of us had and both contribute to the lyrics and music. The results were pretty unique, unlike anything either of us would have written on our own. The first song we did was *Singles (Wish You Were Here)*, and although that was certainly more Reece than me, I remember it being the first proper collaboration that we did. Most of our writing was done at Reece's old house in Waddesdon, usually with plentiful supplies of beer and cheap hash.

1997 proved to be a pretty productive year for us, and we wrote the core of the band's set together in this time. *This Moments Mine*, *Singles*, *Tragedy*, *My Secret Teenage Fantasy*, *Cappuccino*, *Sleeping With The Enemy* and a heavily rewritten *Waster* all came out of this period.

I have, to my shame, no idea when or where the first Debutantes gig was. For all my other bands I kept a record of all our shows, but with The Debutantes I don't know. Hop Pole in Aylesbury must be the perennial favourite, but Barry reckons it was Butlers in the Market Square. I don't know how many gigs we ended up doing either



- could be 20, could be 100! We'd certainly done a few shows before we spent a weekend in London at Redchurch Studios recording our first demo.

The songs we recorded were *Singles*, *Waster*, *Billy* and *Story*. It was a pretty average recording, and you can tell at this point we were still searching for "our sound". The recordings lack a bit of life, and lack the darker dynamic edge we later got. There's plenty of footage on the DVD from this recording session. Only *Singles* and *Waster* hung around long-term in the live set.

By the time we next went into the studio though the band was very much "The Debutantes". We recorded *This Moments Mine* and *My Secret Teenage Fantasy* in the Liscombe Park studios near Wing, working with the excellent Paul Kennedy as engineer. This must have been late 1997/early 1998. These tracks were a little rough around the edges, but still sound excellent today. The songs were both huge epic numbers. We usually opened the set with *This Moments Mine*, a very dark and perverse track about a scorned lover who ends up killing his girlfriend and burying her. *My Secret Teenage Fantasy* became our signature set closer - also very

perverse, but a more humorous tale of a man who becomes so obsessed with his partner that he ends up wearing her clothes and getting breast implants. Hmm.

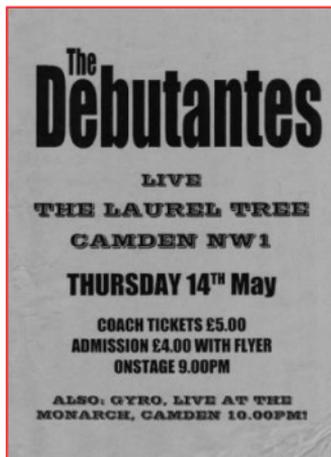


In January 1998 we did what still ranks as one of the best gigs I've ever done. We headlined the legendary "Kazstock" gig at Hazells in Aylesbury - a fundraiser organised by myself and Peter Richardson for our friend Carol Turner who was suffering from cancer. We had 750+ people there, unheard of for a local show in Aylesbury for the time, and it was an amazing night. The cause brought together so many people in a way that would not have happened otherwise. All of our set at this gig is featured on the DVDs.

I remember getting a call from Reece early the next morning after Kazstock, saying some chap called Uri had heard what an amazing show we'd played and wanted to meet us with a view to signing us up to his label. He talked about getting us in the studio with his producer (whose credits included The Verve). Pretty exciting stuff, until we actually met the guy at a rehearsal soon after. As soon as he mentioned recording *Tragedy* with David Bowie the bullshit-o-meter started going off the rails... then his request to provide acoustic versions of our songs to his producer so he

could work on arrangements was met with a fairly definitive "fuck off" from Reece and I. And so ended our relationship with Uri.

1998 was generally pretty busy for the band, and I think we did most of our live shows in this period. I can't really remember any of them of course. Lots of Aylesbury shows, some London shows too. We played a brilliant gig at the Laurel Tree in Camden. I remember the venue being empty apart from two of my friends when we started our set, and by the end of the first song the place was packed with people racing up from the bar downstairs. We came and well and truly conquered. On the flip side was a gig at the Orange in Kensington where everything that could have gone wrong did... we found out in the van on the way to the gig that we weren't playing at all. Then we were told to come along anyway, they could fit us in. When we got there they didn't want us after all, and they only let us play in the end after Reece bribed the promoter with some illicit substances. Even then we had to play at the end of the night. We passed the time sitting in a cafe outside the venue, where some poor old chap was run down and killed outside the window right in front of us. When we got back to the venue, some of Al's drum kit had been stolen. Reece's acoustic guitar was faulty (or was it? I have a sneaky suspicion it may have simply been tuned by roadie Phil Swan - which amounts to much the same thing) and he gave it up during Singles. Unfortunately there was a section of *Singles* where the song just drops down to acoustic guitar alone, so when we got to this section, we all just stopped... and looked very very silly. Oh.



Talking of Phil Swan... I can't place the date to anywhere more accurate than late 1998, but we did a cracking gig in Thame. Phil drove myself and my girlfriend Dolly to the gig, and did his usual roadie duties. Phil was - and is - my oldest friend and an enthusiastic roadie, although it was generally best to keep him away from tuning your instrument. Still, he was always there to lift and load and he dutifully loaded up his car with all my gear after the gig. He even remembered to load Dolly's bag into the car. And then he drove off. Without me or Dolly. Leaving us stranded in Thame. With no phone or money (all in the bag). We did eventually get home thanks to our friendly soundman, but for Phil there was more to come. He'd gone back to Reece's place in Waddesdon, then driven home later. Except his car broke down just outside Waddesdon, so he elected to walk home to Aylesbury instead. Leaving all my gear in

the car on the side of the road. Not his finest moment, and when I retrieved my stuff the next day, it turned out he'd broken down only a couple of hundred yards from Reece's place.

So many of our gigs seemed to attract nutters. I vaguely recall a show at Butlers in the market square where somebody decided to block all the toilets up with concrete. Possibly the same person who knocked over one of the PA speaker stacks on the way in. Then again, I ended the gig leaning on Reece for support so as to remain vertical, so I could be wrong. I recall a fight or two before and after a show at the Buckingham Arms, and the Hop Pole.



At some stage in 1998 we made probably the worst decision we'd ever made and sacked Barry from the band. I think this was in part simply due to Barry's tendency to be a bit of moody bugger at times. But he was an undeniably excellent solid bass player, and the band never quite recovered. Naturally we thought we'd get someone in who would be perfect, but it never happened, and I still regret upsetting the momentum of the band when it was really getting going. Sorry Barry. Lesson learnt. We had another local mate, Guy Horner, take Barry's place for a while, but Guy was a guitarist at heart and it never really worked. Guy also made Barry look distinctly un-moody by comparison. I remember at the aforementioned

Camden gig, he threw down his bass at the end of the set and the neck broke in half.

Pete Rowe came to the rescue for a bit and helped us out on bass to keep rehearsing for while, but we never recovered the momentum of the first 12-18 months of the band. Another friend, Graham Flint, helped us record some bass on some home demos on Reece's new and utterly frustrating computer based studio system. As a result of these troubles, Reece and I wrote very little during this period, and it was only towards the end of the year that things got back on track when we wrote two great tracks - *C.C.T.V.* and *Electric Chair*.

Around the same time we had to replace Alan with Ian. Alan was infuriatingly unreliable, made all the more annoying by the fact that he was a bloody good drummer. In the end we couldn't put up with his inability to remember rehearsals and songs, so we had to look elsewhere. A real shame - Al was a very good mate and great fun to be around. So in came Ian who slotted in pretty seamlessly... a very different style of drummer, but still a very good one. I had first "met" Ian many years before when he was passed out at a party on the floor of the flat I shared with Pete Rowe, although I was unaware who he was at the time.

Eventually we managed to recruit a chap called Harry Blue on bass. I went over to meet him at Reece's place, and was most impressed to find that he was former bass player of My Life Story, one of my favourite bands back then. But it was all downhill from there. Good musician, but with some serious depression issues to deal with. This all came



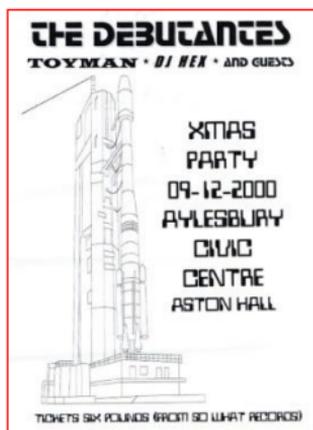
to a head when we supported Drugstore at Aylesbury's Civic Centre in February 1999. Harry was clearly not in a good state, alcohol added to the anti-depressants failed to improve matters, and then there was a fight outside between Reece (and a selection of our crew) and the other support band World Gone Crazy. Someone has accused us of stealing their bass guitar, clearly an outrageous accusation. The police arrived and broke up the fight. Harry disappeared.

The venues security cameras subsequently revealed Harry had walked off with the bass guitar in question. Bastard! I actually missed most of this as I was engaged in an important fire extinguisher foam fight in our dressing room. Still, that was the end of Harry's short-lived tenure in the band. Great gig though.

Not long after this my partner Dolly managed to get herself deported from the UK. Love being what it is, I had no option but to follow her to New Zealand. Leaving my job and home was no problem whatsoever, but I was gutted to be leaving the band. It had gone off the rails a little for a while, but was just beginning to get back on track... as you can tell from our next recording session.

Before I left the UK, we recorded *Electric Chair* and a new version of *Cappuccino* at Liscombe Park studios, with former HipDiRoc guitarist Kirk Luck helping us out on bass. These tracks are a little more polished than the other recordings and still sound remarkably fresh now. *Electric Chair* is the recording I'm most proud of from my time with the band, and ranks up there as one of the best I've done full stop. It's a great song, and one of the few tracks that wasn't a Fairfield/Dean composition, Sparky also contributing to the writing.

And that was pretty much it for me. I moved to New Zealand in May 1999. Here things get hazier still, as nobody has much idea what happened after I left. It wasn't long before Barry was back on bass guitar - a very sensible move by Reece. The band continued as a 4 piece, heading in a more Numan-esque direction. Ian was now playing an electronic drum kit. Lots of new songs were written, including *Kubrick*, *Machine*, *Vision* and *Vaseline Tigers*. I actually co-wrote again with Reece on *Machine* and *Vision* - he faxed the rough lyrics to me in New Zealand and I sent him back some more ideas. Kind of odd, as I had no idea what the songs actually sounded like. There was a great gig at the Limelight Theatre in Aylesbury during this time, which was filmed for a possible Channel 4 program that never happened. Again, most the songs from this are on the DVDs.



At some point in late 1999/early 2000 Ian left the band and Al was back on the drum stool - with real drums again. I came back home after a year in New Zealand and joined the band for a gig in Thame in May 2000, playing the latter half of the set with them. Once again, some of this show is captured on the DVDs. The band had become more of a part-time concern by this stage, and I don't think there were any more shows until December. At this time I was preparing to emigrate permanently to Australia at Christmas, but before I left we booked another session at Liscombe Park studios and recorded *Machine* and *Vision*. These recordings came up ok, but weren't as good as they should have been. Primarily I think because

we got Al to play on our friend Darren's electric drum kit, which he just wasn't comfortable with. Versions of both these songs were later to appear on the first Zeptepi album.

There was a big celebratory show in December 2000 at Aylesbury's Aston Hall. This was begun with a set from the current Debutantes (Reece, Alan, Sparky & Barry), then I joined them for some of the older numbers, and then the gig finished off with

a few songs from HipDiRoc days. We had an excellent crowd in, and it was a fitting end to an era.

The band continued as a 4-piece after this for a few more years. I don't really know the details of what happened... what I do know is there was a recording session at Pete Rowe's studio down in Crouch End, London. These recordings were never finished unfortunately, and much to my disappointment they have now disappeared entirely, and I never got to hear them. Barry tells me there was a great version of *Vaseline Tigers* recorded in this session.

Something strange happened after this. Circa 2001/2 Al left the band again, and Ian rejoined. I think the band actually split up, but then Ian urged Reece to get it together again. This incarnation featured two girl singers, Tasha and Vicky (I think it was Ian's girlfriend and her sister). A couple of demos were recorded of them doing versions of *Story* and *Singles* - they're included on the CD, although I think Reece



was never happy with them. They only did one gig with this line up (another Kazstock gig, at the Kings Head), probably for the best.

I came back to England in July 2003 to get married. Reece organised a big party at his place for the day after and set up a marquee (at the very painful cost of one of his teeth thanks to a disagreement with a heavily loaded

spring) in his garden. Sparky was on holiday at the time, but Reece, Ian and Barry played a short set before I joined them for a few numbers. This was the first gig I'd done since 2000, and enabled me to realise what a mistake it was that I'd had three years of not performing. The gig was an absolute blast, and you can see a couple of tracks from this on the DVDs.

Not long after the wedding Reece had a bad accident, coming off his Harley Davidson. Sadly he wasn't snorting cocaine and playing guitar as it happened. But he badly damaged his hand, and as a result couldn't play guitar for many months after. Nevertheless there was a final gig to come. Reece, Barry, Ian and Sparky played another Kazstock show at Aylesbury's Limelight Theatre in April 2004, a gig which Barry tells me was the best gig the band did.

And then it was gone.

The Debutantes were an enormous formative experience for me. I'd been very uncomfortable as a frontman in my previous bands, and it was a fantastic learning experience to sit back as guitarist only and watch Reece front the group. By the time I was ready to lead my own band again a few years later I had learnt a huge amount from him in terms of stagecraft, song-writing and singing. This gave me the confidence I'd never had before and I count myself very lucky that we worked together.

Reece pretty much gave up music for about the next 5 years. But the last year or two has seen him resurrect HipDiRoc as 48 Krash, with Al on drums, Kirk on guitar and Bogy on bass. They're still playing a couple of Debutantes numbers, and playing regular local shows, much to my pleasure.



Barry is working in IT and living in Northampton. Ian now lives in South Africa - a long way from his beloved native Wales. Sparky is still living in Hertfordshire and working in Hemel Hempstead. Rumours abound that Reece is trying to recruit him for 48 Krash - I hope he does. I haven't heard from Harry since the infamous bass-stealing incident... but there is a Harry Blue on Facebook who looks very familiar and happens to play bass. Hopefully he's happier now. Guy is the only one left in Aylesbury, and has a band called Dumb Angel.

I'm still in Australia, and have been playing live with my band Zeptepi since 2004. The Debutantes refuse to go away - Zeptepi have been working on a drastically rewritten version of *Cappuccino* this year.

It's a tragedy.

Phil Dean, Melbourne (July 2011)