

# BEHIND THE SOUNDS

An Interview with

# Rupert HINE

Rupert Hine is best known as being a producer of some reknown. Being the man responsible for fashioning albums for the likes of **The Fixx, Howard Jones, Tina Turner, Duncan Sheik, Milla, Stevie Nicks, Rush and Bob Geldof** (to name eight of the hundreds of projects he's been involved with), it's safe for you to be ignorant of his own recordings. Yet Hine, who started his musical career in the '60s, is a talented songwriter and performer in his own right. Using technology (but not relying on it) as a starting point, Hine has created albums filled with emotional depth, melodic strength and heartfelt warmth in a musical climate not used to such shananigans. Those of you who are not familiar with his solo work may remember the soundtrack work he did on the cult film *Better Off Dead* or his '70s outfit, **Quantam Jump**. If you still are not familiar with his work, think of a mixture of Peter Gabriel and the Fixx as a starting point then let your mind expand to the nether regions of your imagination. It is there that Hine resides. Whether under his own name or under his pseudonym, **Thinkman**, Hine has remained intriguing and interesting, adding respectability to the 'synth-pop' world while standing outside the mainstream. Spaz was able to locate Rupert on vacation in France and to get his thoughts on his own solo work, focusing on his '80s and '90s output.

**POPsided:** Do you mind being referred to these days as a synth pioneer, showing audiences that the use of synthesizers in a pop or rock setting could be far more inventive and emotional than *A Flock of Seagulls* could ever show them?

**Rupert Hine:** I first used a synth heavily on my second album, *Unfinished Picture*, recorded in 1971-72. One track was recorded entirely with the main-frame Moog and no other instruments. I always approached synthesis in a totally suck-it-and-see experimental way... never from a technical standpoint. A lot of what I have achieved sonically that is often credited to synthesis is, in fact, sounds from the 'real world' controlled by tape-loops, running things backwards, using pots and pans and pieces of string! I actually received an award in 1982 for *Waving Not Drowning* - The Best Electronic Album of the Year - there was almost nothing electronic on the record! I have been called, in the '80s, the Master of the Fairlight - I have never owned or even hired one!

**POP:** Listening to *Immunity* ('81), there seems to be an interesting conflict of technology and melody that adds tension to even the most haunting and pretty passages (most evident in "Make A Wish" and "Samsara"). Was it your goal to make an album that was as unsettling as it was enjoyable?

**RH:** I always figured that if you were moved to write a song about, say, capital punishment ("I Think A Man Will Hang Soon") then make it as impassioned and violent as the topic itself. People are generally much more prepared to be 'moved' or shocked by film than they are by records... I don't see the difference... both are totally compelling mediums that should engulf the viewer/listener.

**POP:** Your music is based in melody but so drenched in mood and modern technology that it is hard to decipher any musical influences. What were the influences that started you on this musical journey?

**RH:** Gustav Mahler - his music filled the house I grew up in. Brian Wilson - his writing/arranging & production of *Pet Sounds* made me want to "paint

pictures with sound" too. Phil Spector - for creating atmospheres until then experienced only with orchestral music. Frederick Delius - for showing how passionate the calmest of music can be. Bo Diddley - for convincing me that, sometimes, just the groove is enough! Kid Baltan & Tom Dissevelt - for creating entirely electronic soundscapes in the late '50s/early '60s that proved electronic music possible. (My father bought their first EP *Electronic Movements* on Phillips... I wonder if that has ever been re-mastered on CD?)...

**POP:** From this point on, you were writing the music and Jeanette-Therese Obstoj was providing the lyrics. How did this collaboration come about?

**RH:** I met her in the mid '70s, introduced by a mutual friend, Simon Jeffes, and was impressed by her poetry. After a few early experiments within **Quantum Jump** we finally became focused on our relative strengths for the *Immunity* album. I had also become 'involved' with her by then, which was to last through to the mid-'80s.

**POP:** *Waving Not Drowning*, also in '81, had even more great melodies than *Immunity* yet stepped out further in terms of song structures and arrangements. What usually comes first for you, the melodies or the mood and feel of the song?

**RH:** On the three A & M albums - the 'topic' would almost always come first. Then a 'plot' and an idea of how we would want the 'audience' to feel after the track had stopped.

**POP:** *The Wildest Wish To Fly*, released in '83, was a musical triumph, mixing a great batch of songs with a more mainstream edge to it. Upon its release, I felt that this would be the album that would give you a massive amount of airplay in the States. Was it frustrating when the label didn't push it over here?

**RH:** By then, I had become used to a level of 'artistic credibility' which, by definition, seems to mean a relatively modest audience. The sales on my albums has always been significant enough to keep record companies interested in releasing them but never so much as to be deemed 'a hit.' It's not a bad position to be in... no pressure for 'follow-ups'... in fact, no pressure at all! Confusingly, *TWWTF* was released on A & M for the rest of the world but Island in the US... this did not help matters either on that album. Just prior to making *Immunity* I wrote, recorded & arranged a single that sold 500,000 copies in the UK with my band **Quantum Jump**, but this was a very jokey and 'up' track originally written and recorded in 1974... re-recorded and released in 1979 when it reached no 3 in the UK charts... (I do have 'hits' I guess - just not very often)!

**POP:** How did you hook up with Savage Steve Holland and become the musical director of '85s *Better Off Dead* film and soundtrack?

**RH:** A & M were producing the soundtrack... it was initially a suggestion of theirs. I fell in love with S.S.Holland's script... sadly he lost the plot whilst making his debut as director.

**POP:** "Arrested By You", from the soundtrack, is perhaps one of the greatest ballads ever written. Was this a made-to-order track, or did you already have the melody floating around by the time this project came about?

**RH:** It was already written (though only just before)... I like it too. Have you heard Dusty Springfield's version on the *Shop Boy's* produced album? It's good, very sympathetic.

**POP:** This soundtrack also introduced listeners to *Thinkman*, a 'band' that you fronted. Why did you chose to release your recordings under a band name instead of your own name, which was already becoming recognizable due to



