

On Reflection

The newsletter
of *The APEX*

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"Until we have a great listening public, and not just a passively hearing one, we will never be a musically cultured nation."
—Leonard Bernstein

Bill Bruford's Earthworks WORKS!

Is it jazz? Is it progressive rock? Does it matter? Sort of, kind of, and definitely not. Whatever is written or thought about Bill Bruford's Earthworks, one thing is clear: this music is complex, fascinating, deftly performed, and far beyond the scope of today's more popular instrumental fare.

Earthworks is not the first instrumental group that Bruford has formed. The first, self-consciously called Bruford, was a far different animal than this. Brutally electric and forcefully intricate, Bruford the group was for Bruford the man a chance to challenge himself in coming out as a composer and bandleader without the dead weight of a rock singer or expectations to perform Yes and King Crimson material.

In contrast, Earthworks creates with a subtler and more jazz-oriented palette. The music has a flexible compositional style, inviting true improvisation rather than just gratuitous jamming. Bruford shares the composing chores, by no means accounting for the lion's share of the material. He is not so much a bandleader (calling the group *Bill Bruford's Earthworks* is most likely a marketing move) as a nucleus, a rather traditional role for a very untraditional drummer.

Compare also the artillery. Taking the leads formerly supplied by Allan Holdsworth's white hot electric guitar is now the soul fire of Iain Bellamy's tenor and soprano saxophones. The day-glo colors of Dave Stewart's intricate keyboards become the pastoral shadings of Django Bates' prophet 5, with added heat from his tenor horn. The



L-R: Iain Bellamy and Bill Bruford

greased lightning of Jeff Berlin's electric bass is replaced by the turbo-powered acoustic and electric (about a 65/35 ratio) basses of Tim Harries.

And Bruford? His post-'70s-Crimson acoustic kit emphasized high-pitched tom-toms and rototoms, and he

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Relayer

STEWART & GASKIN

Dave Stewart (ex-Egg, Hatfield & the North, National Health, Bruford, and all-around Canterbury keyboard-for-hire) and Barbara Gaskin are bringing their unique brand of progressive pop to tiny American clubs. At a recent gig in Somerville, you could've driven a truck through the dance floor. Still, the faithful got a too-rare chance to see one of the great keyboardists of all time ply his trade.

Regretfully, I had to leave early but was impressed with a cover of Joni Mitchell's "Amelia," rendered faithful in its haunting tone of lost opportunities. Also, a light-hearted tribute to the music and musicians of yesteryear, the many-textured "The '60s Never Died."

Joining Stewart and Gaskin was a guitarist whose name I didn't pick up. The trio played to pre-recorded rhythm tracks made up of keyboards and drum machines. It was most interesting to see Stewart's keyboard setup, as it combined newer technologies with old knob-littered moogs.

The pair have a new album out. Like their first, it contains originals and interesting covers like Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick Blues." The music doesn't represent Stewart at the peak of his creativity but it's worth going to see such an important figure in the history of progressive music.

BUSY BRUFORD

In addition to touring with Earthworks (who have a new album due in April), and the forthcoming ABWH album and tour (due early next year), Bill Bruford managed to slip in an appearance on fusion guitarist David Torn's newest album. Bruford appeared on Torn's previous album, *Cloud About Mercury*, with Tony Levin and Mark Isham.

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APEX CONVENTION

Thanks to Colleen Tyler, who put the idea into our heads, and the several people who have told me they support the idea, I am planning on planning an APEX convention to be held in the Boston area in the spring. If anyone in the local area has any information on good, inexpensive halls that would serve this purpose, please let me know.

I hope that such an event could serve a number of purposes: 1) for APEX members to meet and make contacts, 2) for musicians to meet and perform for the attendees, 3) to listen to a wide variety of progressive music from around the world, and 4) to invite more people into the APEX. People could trade tapes and lists but I'm afraid the cost would be higher if any sales were allowed.

There would naturally be an admission price to offset the cost of renting the hall and necessary equipment. That price would depend on how many people show up. If you have an interest in attending, please let me know. If you would be willing to put up an out-of-state APEX member who wanted to attend, please let me know that, too.

After I have secured a date and location, I will also make a strong attempt to invite a progressive artist to speak to our throng. It is important that I know what to plan for, so please let me know if you're interested. I am probably going to shoot for April.

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Kel Loch & Gold: Oh, Wiseguys, eh?

Even within the ranks of its faithful supporters, the genre of progressive music has a reputation of being an OH SO SERIOUS form of music played by OH SO SERIOUS musicians. And even though *we* can connect to the passion contained in a piece of music that a pundit may claim to be cold and intellectual, there's something to be said for occasionally having some fun with those pesky creative impulses.

There are, of course, a number of progressive artists who have demonstrated a sense of humor in their work, or who don't take themselves quite as seriously as their music. Among them are folks like Frank Zappa, 10cc/Godley & Creme, Gentle Giant, and Todd Rundgren. In fact, these artists constitute many of the influences of the latest progressive group to actually smile while playing music—Kel Loch & Gold.

You may remember reading about Andy Kel Loch and Scottt Gold in the Directory of Unsigned Progressive Artists that was featured in the January 1990 issue of *On Reflection* (Vol. I, No. 12). Former members of the Boston-based progressive band The Treatment, Andy and Scottt left to concentrate on creating original progressive compositions that were complex and interesting but fun and playful, with lyrics that spoke of real conditions in today's society.

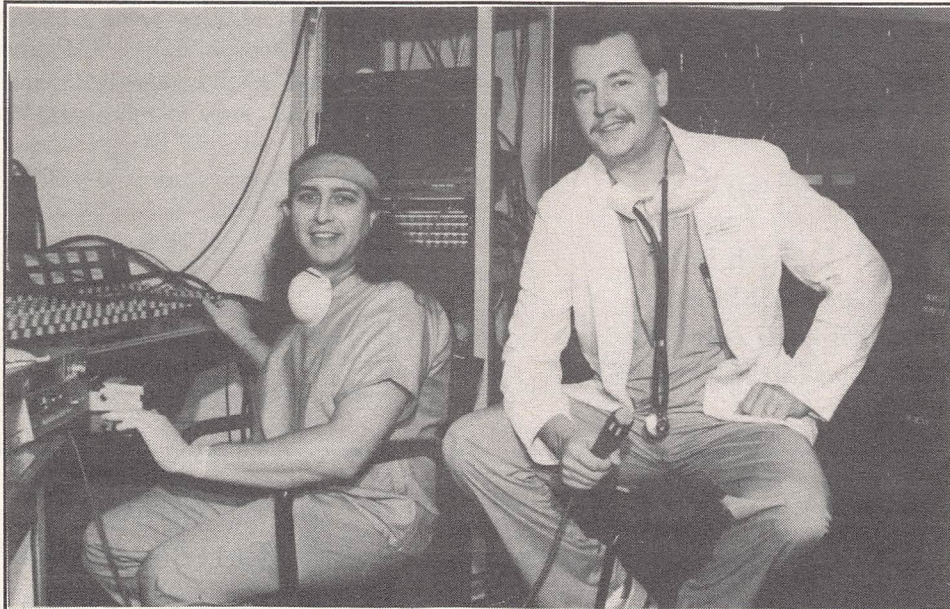
After investing in instruments, gadgets, and recording equipment, the two spent the better part of the last year working on their

first cassette-only album, *Men in Black* (the title, of course, comes from the only Three Stooges short nominated for an Academy Award). Just released and now available via the mail, *Men in Black* is a strong album that stands up to repeated listenings. Kel Loch & Gold make it clear that newer progressive artists can pay homage to their influences while forging their own identity and breaking new ground at the same time.

The album contains eight originals and one cover tune. The

response to megastar charities like USA for Africa. Without disregard for the nobility of the effort and its success in bringing issues like hunger to the public agenda, Kel Loch pleads instead for long-term political change: "Lying, corrupt and selfish leaders profit from the dying/Upon whose backs the empire stands/Crying—we shed a tear and send a dollar but we're buying/The means for the powerful to subjugate the destitute."

Musically, the second track



Scottt Gold (left) and Andy Kel Loch, ready to operate.

equipment list is something even Jules Verne couldn't have dreamed up: Atari Mega 4 computer, Korg T3 Music Workstation, Yamaha TG33 Tone Generator, Roland Pad-80/Octapad II controller, Fender Stratocaster guitar, Ibanez guitar, Roland guitar synthesizer, M.V. Pedulla Series II bass guitar, Lane Poor Minima Classic fretless bass guitar, Digitech DSP-128, Yamaha SPX-90, Lexicon PCM 41, Peavey Programax 10 MIDI amp, Tascam 688 MIDI Studio, Teac A-1200U, and the trusty Tascam 112.

Now to the songs. Side One leads off with "Canon," written as a

ominous shouts. The song closes with the evil side gloating over his savage victory and the sound of crickets chirping in a too-quiet night. Save this for next year's Halloween party tape.

"Industrial Waste" follows. This is a reworking of a track the pair did in The Treatment. The target here is those who manufacture, use, and dump poisonous chemicals and toxins into the environment. The one-line chorus, "A waste is a terrible thing to mind," tells it all. This track has a very mechanical feel to it, with fast disjointed lines of guitar, trumpet, and various electronics.

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Market Value

WANTED:

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Bill Bruford's Earthworks *continued*

was starting to move away from heavy-handed cymbal rides. Now his post-'80s-Crimson kit is made up largely of Simmons pads and he is back on his cymbals (a jazz tradition). He still has his trademark acoustic snare but he also uses a Simmons snare and a Simmons bass drum. He plays a supporting role when appropriate and goes on top as any second horn player would.

The most dramatic innovation of Bruford's, which makes a clear break from his late '70s quartet, is his use of "chordal drums," defined as "a system whereby striking a drum pad triggers keyboard pitches." He uses the chordal drums as the base layer of sound in several of Earthworks' pieces. Like a complex ostinato, it has the subtlety and hypnotic effect of the twin-guitar dances of Adrian Belew and Robert Fripp in the '80s King Crimson. And yet, in this context, it takes on a far looser feel.

I caught Earthworks live at two shows, both first sets. They played in Cambridge, MA on October 3. For unexplained reasons, the show began more than 30 minutes late. To accommodate the crowd waiting in line for the second set and those annoying Boston-area club

curfews, they played for only 75 minutes. What they lacked in quantity . . . you know the rest.

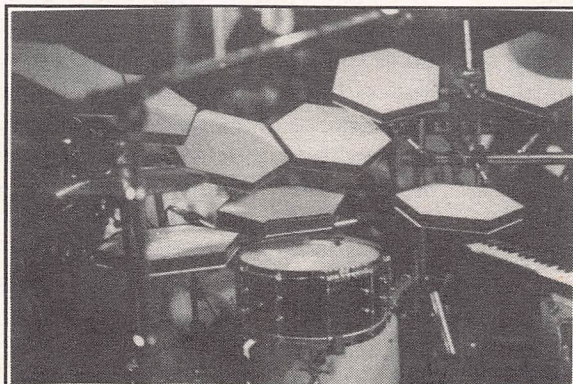
They opened with "Dancing on Frith Street," the first of six consecutive songs from their second and most recent album, *Dig?* (no, that's the name of the album, dig?). Both Bellamy and Bates took solos during this swaggering post-post-bebop tune. Bellamy, in particular, gave the crowd an early indication that his soprano work is a workout indeed. On "Libreville," Bruford and Bates set a salsa-flavored beat with chordal drums and keyboards, with Bates going on to a dazzling solo on the prophet 5. After this song, Bruford rose to say a few words, introducing Earthworks as a "British jazz group, though I use the term 'jazz' loosely as a lot of blood and ink have been spilled on that one already." He then introduced the next song, "A Stone's Throw," which has the most decidedly jazzy flavor of any song on the second album. On this tune, a moody

and romantic ballad, Bruford used brushes and played some chordal drums as Bellamy and Bates ably stepped out on tenor sax and piano, respectively.

That lead to "Stromboli Kicks," the fun and frisky opener to *Dig?* Bruford did a modestly wonderful solo but all heads turned during Harries' incredible electric bass solo. Fast, fluid, and elegant lines flew from the strings as he demonstrated an unusual ability to adopt distinct styles on acoustic and electric bass. Chordal drums introduced "Pilgrim's Way," another ballad with a smoky tenor solo from Bellamy.

Bruford then announced that they would do a rendition of that "famous jazz oeuvre" by Petula Clark, "Downtown." Taking it even further than they do on the album, the group reached their peak as they goaded each other to new heights. As Bellamy was tearing up the joint with his tenor sax exclamations, Bates was pounding out a feverish keyboard

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*Far left:
Tim Harries.*

*Top left:
Django Bates and
Iain Bellamy.*

*Bottom left:
Bruford's arsenal.*

Malibran: for the progressive cognoscente

Confession: I'm not that well-versed on the Italian progressive scene. I have records by Banco, Il Baricentro, and P.F.M. in my collection, but I realize that I have barely scratched the surface of that region's flavors. So if it seems presumptuous of me to suggest that Malibran, a brand new group whose first album, *The Wood of Tales*, was just recently released, belongs in that echelon of breakthrough Italian groups, then perhaps I'll just throw off my crash helmet altogether and assert that this album may be the strongest debut of any progressive band since U.K.

What impresses me most is the maturity and fullness of the compositions and the ability of the six musicians to mesh and demonstrate their ability without cluttering up the music. I believe this is a group that will make important contributions to the progressive literature.

While they are led by a flutist and are likely influenced by Jethro Tull (I believe the title *The Wood of Tales* is an ungrammatical play on Tull's *Songs from the Wood*), Malibran has an original sound. The flute remains soft and sweet, contrasting with the darker colors of the two electric guitars. Missing from the Tull touch is the nod to English folk music (logically); instead they emphasize a more classical structure. They take their time developing themes and allow the various instruments to lead different sections.

Malibran consists of Giancarlo Cutuli (flute and sax), Angelo Messina (bass), Alessio Scaravilli (drums and percussion), Jerry Litrico (electric and classical guitars), Giuseppe Scaravilli (vocals, electric and acoustic guitars), and Benny Torrisi (keyboards). The LP is the first release on the independent Pegaso label, headed by co-producer Riccardo Maccari.

The Wood of Tales was recorded during the summer of 1989, but has none of the fat production

sound of '80s recordings. Instead, the sound has the natural ambience of records done 15 years earlier. While the album cover art has a stereotypical '70s-progressive feel, there is nothing contrived or ungenue about the music. This is great new music that will satisfy both sides of the '70s/'80s preference fence.

The album opens with "Malibran," which starts out as a dramatic rocker with nice piano and guitar work. Soon, though, the flute, with excellent backing from Messina's bass, comes in and lays a more restful, contented atmosphere. The lyrics to this song are sung in Italian. After it revs up, there is a nice Bloomdidolike flute solo, after which the theme is restated.

Next is "The Wood of Tales," a great instrumental featuring inspired guitar solos. It is obvious these musicians have spent a long time discovering what their instruments are capable of. There's some good drumming on this track as well. While the times aren't listed, this is a pretty long track; all the songs are likewise full and meaty.

"Sarabanda" closes Side One. The Sarabande is a Spanish dance form and in this piece, it is the flute and classical guitar who perform a *pas de deux*. Excellent technique brings an uncharacteristic brashness to the classical guitar, while the flute remains light, graceful and nimble throughout.

Side Two starts with "Pyramid's Street." This tune is sung in English and features very Eastern-sounding flute parts. As with all the tunes, there is an understated drama in the mood of the piece that calls the various instruments to respond. Here it is the guitar, drums, and keyboards that relate the action in the scene.

"Prelude" (an odd title since it's the last song on the album) opens with a gentle section of organ, flute and acoustic guitar. After a couple of verses of English lyrics, however, it

takes off with an invigorating guitar solo. The pace never falters as more guitar solos separate other verses and a drum section. With Eric Johnson-like speed and sonority, the guitars bring this terrific album to a close.

There are two editions of this recording (LP only). The Normal edition (1,000 pressings) is 16,000 Lira, while a Special edition (300 pressings), featuring colored vinyl, a poster and a numbered and autographed copy of the album, sells for 27,000 Lira. Send to Pegaso, c/o Riccardo Maccari, Via L. Mascherpa, 34, 00144 Roma, ITALY. ☺

Kel Loch & Gold, cont.

"Updraft" is another older tune with a strong-but-too-slow-for-funky bass line by Gold and "power chords" credited to guitarist Dave Stura. Kel Loch sings long vocal lines lamenting the wasteful American way of life. After the darkness of "Industrial Waste," this song seems to belie its own negative message with a bouncy arrangement that includes organ samples (I think) and tenor sax.

Side One closes with a fairly faithful cover of Brian Wilson's "I Just Wasn't Made for These Times" from his magnum opus, the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*. This song, almost a quarter of a century after it was written, is an excellent choice for Kel Loch & Gold because it relates the frustration of being a creative person in a formulaic world. For Brian, it was wanting to explore limitless sonic possibilities while his record label, his family, and the rest of the Beach Boys wanted the same old hits. For Kel Loch & Gold, as well as all the other progressive musicians in the world, it is a cry against an industry that stifles originality and forces groups into a narrow mainstream. This is a nice touch.

continued next page

Kel Loch & Gold: Men in Black *continued*

Side Two offers more musical excitement. "Frantic" is an anthem for those who despise religious fanatics and their fund raising tactics. The song starts out moody and atmospheric, until a collage of evangelical voices opens the musical Pandora's Box. The manic beat is augmented by guitar and synthesizer lines. The pace slows to an offbeat time signature as more taped voices add to the outrage and confusion. If there's a way to insult every imaginable religion, these guys do it and with humor, too.

"The Fact or Fantasy Factor" is a short song that proposes that the American two-party system hides the fact that there is instead a two-class system: the ruling class (those in government) and the peasant class (you and me). The over-distorted vocals are actually a good metaphor for the song's hypothesis. How many of the nation's voters really listen and understand the issues compared to those who base their decisions on

distorted TV images?

"One Good Turn" features more dueling vocal lines and a driving rhythm. Kel Loch takes the fighting spirit of the American colonists and tries to instill it today to keep the common people from being hapless victims of bureaucratic hypocrisy. This tune goes right into the big closer, "Resolution." Just under nine minutes long, "Resolution" takes up the fight proposed in "One Good Turn." Before a backdrop of dramatic keyboards and terrific guitar work by Dave Stura, our hero sheds his complacency and takes a stand: "Immortality will have to wait 'til I clean up the mess we've made/ Responsibility rests firmly on the shoulders of the one who always rested in the shade."

The topics are heavy and the angles are decisive but this is really a fun album. In fact, this could well be the new direction for progressive music that we have been hoping the

'90s would provide. Using modern technology and abandoning '70s cosmic themes in favor of real-world topics, Kel Loch & Gold create eclectic works that look over their shoulders at the '70s while their style and well-focused concerns belong to today and the challenges of the '90s.

Working on their own, there is always the danger of adding too many layers and/or sacrificing purpose for effect. In a couple of places, they almost cross that line but manage to pull it in due mainly to the humor that lurks mischievously inside each song. The end message of this work seems to be that the times are desperate and extreme action is needed, but there's no need to lose your sense of humor over it.

Andy Kel Loch & Scott Gold are a couple of forward-looking musicians who are dedicating their lives "for duty and humanity;" that goal and their album both sound damn good to me. ☺



Kel Loch & Gold

Music evolves. We must never be afraid to expand our horizons, to eschew the mundane and to fashion something new out of what has been handed down to us through the ages. Start with a basic rock rhythm and setup, add overtones of classical, jazz,



soul, R&B, baroque and any other form or style of music ever heard on this planet, garnish with a frosting of humor, satire and political awareness and you will begin to understand the imperatives that lurk within the music of *Kel Loch & Gold*

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Bill Bruford's Earthworks *continued*

support. Bruford and Harries paved a gritty urban rhythm that left the crowd as sweaty as the players.

The last song of the set was the first from their debut, suddenly three years old. The two part "The Shepherd is Eternal"/"Bridge of Inhibition" begins with the whoosh of Bruford playing a whirling instrument (this time on tape) and then goes into a hectic, eclectic slugfest, with Bruford taking a serious solo. Starting with his snare loosened to give a hollow sound, he did some rim patterns and precision snare work. Soon he was all over his kit, playing fast, musical runs with deceiving ease. A more powerful, showy outing than his solos of recent years, Bruford's ability never fails to amaze.

The group came back for an encore. The crowd shouted for "Thud," from the first album, and

"Thud" they got. The set went fast but everyone seemed to agree they got their money's worth. In Northampton, MA a few days later, they did a similar show but added a couple of songs that had to be omitted from the Cambridge gig. The first, "Gentle Persuasion" from *Dig?*, was short and they didn't seem interested in doing much with it. The second, introduced as a "morose, sad, unhappy little tune," was in fact the hot, rambunctious "Emotional Shirt" from the first album.

Notable contrasts between the two shows include Bruford's "jazz" disclaimer. In Northampton, he declared that "we look at things differently than our North American counterparts." During his "Stromboli" solo, Bruford did some intense bass drum patterns that he answered on his toms. The version of "Bridge

of Inhibition," done without the whirling introduction, was particularly hot, a Dionysian free-for-all that climaxed with another incredible Bruford solo.

As demonstrated on record and in concert, Earthworks is most interested in exploring dynamics. Now the music is soft and sinewy, now it's strong and surging. There is much ground to cover and Earthworks is well-equipped to do it. I imagine that after ABWH, Bruford is anxious to make the most of this opportunity to play small clubs with eager musicians. No smoke, no stage props. Just music that's filling to the mind and the soul. Word has it that the third Earthworks album will be released in April. This is certainly more worth looking forward to than the next ABWH album, due sometime between now and then. ☺

The APEX

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We know progressive music when we hear it!