

**[TRACK 1]**

JAMES:

*Well my name's James and I'm interviewing the local musician and performer Paul Weatherhead. Welcome Paul.*

PAUL WEATHERHEAD:

Hiya James.

JAMES:

*So, first things first. How long have you been doing the music thing?*

PW:

I've been playing music since I was about thirteen or fourteen when I got my first second hand nylon strung guitar and ever since really. I'm forty-two now so...quite a long time.

JAMES:

*Ah, nothing like the specific's there, nylon string guitar.*

PW:

No I'm string guitar.

JAMES:

*What inspired you to begin playing guitar?*

PW:

It was...I suppose just the love of music really, from my parents' record collection when I was a kid. Since listening to that really you know I got into music and the guitar seemed to be the obvious instrument to go for. My dad was a brass player in a brass band and so there was that sort of tradition in the family. My grandma was a ukulele player in a ukulele orchestra that entertained the troupes, so it did sort of run in the family a little bit, but yes, I bought my first guitar when I was about thirteen or fourteen. It was a truly terrible nylon strung instrument, anyway the next guitar was a bit better but it was still pretty crap, but you know over the years I've tried to upgrade and get better ones as I went along.

JAMES:

*But have you been keeping your original ones or did you have to sell them?*

PW:

I sold them or gave them away. I really wasn't sentimental about any guitar that wasn't any good really, you know the nice ones that I've had you know, I've maybe been a bit more sentimental about those.

JAMES:

*How many guitars do you have in your collection now?*

PW:

I don't really have a collection. I've got one, two...I've got four and one of them's good and the other three are broken or in a bad state of repair.

JAMES:

*Oh fair enough then. How many guitars can you play at once unless you're some magical musician.*

PW:

Yeah I can only play one at a time unfortunately.

JAMES:

*Do you play in a band at all then?*

PW:

I've played in several bands over the years. The bands that I'm playing in at the moment are 'The Ukrainians' which are a sort of Ukrainian language folk punk group, I've been playing with them for about twelve years now, I play electric mandolin in those.

JAMES:

*Fair while then, twelve years.*

PW:

Twelve years, it is a long time actually when you think about. The other band that I play with is 'The Electric Brains' who are a sort of garage psychedelic band based around Hebden Bridge and I play the theremin with that band.

JAMES:

*That's impressive. A theremin's not an easy instrument to master.*

JAMES:

Well I mean it's got a reputation as being you know the hardest instrument in the world to learn, and it is and you know, it's a challenge and it's stretching me to try things I haven't done before, and also it sounds weird which is always exciting for me.

JAMES:

*What inspires you?*

PW:

What inspires me? I'd say my main inspirations over the years have been three things. One is – I've a great love for 1960's psychedelia and the sort of weirdness that came with studio experimentation, the second one would be 1980's video nasties and sort of cheapo horror films in general, and the third one would be the weird stuff that's been happening in the Calder Valley throughout history, that's approx the Hebden Bridge Times from the nineteenth century to the present day.

JAMES:

*Oh right. Is the 1980's video nasties part of the inspiration behind your labotomist*

*performance?*

PW:

It is yeah, and quite a few of my songs feature zombies. 'Night of the Hippy Dead' of course is about hippy zombies in Hebden Bridge, 'Porn of the Dead' is about zombie erotica, 'Commy Flesh Eaters' is about Communists, Marxist Leninists, zombies, so yeah eighties mass films have been quite a strong feature of my songs.

[‘Night of the Hippy Dead’ excerpt]:

It was the night of the hippy dead  
The night of the hippy dead  
We rose again  
To eat your brain  
But only if you're vegetarian

JAMES:

*That's impressive. It's such a wide variation in subject matter. Like you say you've got your zombies all the way through to Communist...Communists in general. Where did you get that sort of inspiration from?*

PW:

Well I mean I've sort of being influenced by Russian music quite a lot because I worked in Russia for a few years, I was an English teacher so I heard the Slavic music and that sort of fed into my playing for 'The Ukrainians' a bit later, so I've always been fascinated by Russian music, Greek music as well, but that came from my teaching English in Greece for three years.

[excerpt from one of 'The Ukrainians' songs]:

That's when he tried to bite me  
Commi flesh eaters are coming  
Commi flesh eaters are here  
Workers of the world  
Cast away your chains  
You've nothing to lose  
But your brain

JAMES:

*Is that what brings about 'The Ukrainians' unique sound?*

PW:

Yeah I mean 'The Ukrainians' sort of unique sound is a strange sort of mash of Eastern European folk melodies with Western guitar punk and indie music and that sort of gives it the uniqueness, it's not so unique now when you've got bands like Gorgol Bodello and Balkan Beat, but you know, twenty years ago 'The Ukrainians' were pioneers in this kind of music.

JAMES:

*Well, I can imagine back then it was sort of – there was fairly a sort of angle that you*

*went for and everyone followed the main stream.*

[excerpt from music]

*When you started playing out was there anyone that you sort of aspired to be like, or anyone that you aspired to better?*

PW:

I'd say musical inspiration for when I was learning to play the guitar and those sort of formative years would be the psychedelic folk bands, especially *'The Incredible String Band'* were a big influence and the first band or duo that I played in really were called *'Amoeba Pie'* that featured myself and another local musician Michael West, and we did several home recordings and gigs round the valley when we were... sixteen, seventeen, eighteen and then had periodic reunions after that, but we called ourselves *The Incredible String Band of the 1980s* and we followed that sort of loose, stoned, hippy folk vibe for the songs that we did with *'Amoeba Pie'*.

JAMES:

*Also, not only who did you aspire to be like, but who would you love to share a stage with, playing even some of your songs and some of their songs?*

PW:

That's a difficult question, probably because there'd be so many people that I'd like to share a stage with, I mean not all of them are alive. Sid Barrett I suppose would have been fun, you know, 1867 Pink Floyd, I would have liked to have played a bit of theremin on some of their earlier songs, that would have been fantastic. So Sid Barrett would certainly be one. Who else? Okay, *'The Electric Prunes'* were a seminal sixties psychedelic band and I think you know I would have loved to have added a bit of theremin to their backwards guitars and so on.

JAMES:

*It's always the theremin isn't it? Is it that sort of eerie noise that you'd like to bring to music because I mean personally I think that theremins add a sort of edge to something, it sort of like, it puts you on edge. Is that the sort of thing, like you were saying playing with Sid Barrett, I mean Sid Barrett's music that he wrote anyway was trippy enough; is the theremin for you just a way of like making it trippier?*

PW:

Yeah and it's associated with science fiction films and horror films from the fifties and sixties so yeah, it does bring a sort of feeling of unease and weirdness to music so yeah, that's certainly true.

JAMES:

*How do you remember all the lyrics? Like your song 'The Wonky Donkey' – bit of an odd reference, I mean if anyone ever watched any childhood during the nineties they'd have seen 'SMTV Live' with their Wonky Donkey, it's such a strange subject. What brought about 'Wonky Donkey'?*

PW:

I purposefully sat down to try and write the stupidest song that had ever been written.

I didn't know about this TV Wonky Donkey from the nineties, someone told me about it later, but I had heard the terrible joke 'what do you call a donkey with three legs? A wonky donkey' and I took that as the starting point and it sort of grew from there. There were only six verses, now there are god knows how many, but yeah I get 'Wonky Donkey' shouted at me in the street quite a lot so yeah, that seems to have been my biggest hit so far, in fact I'm still trying to live it down.

[excerpt from 'Wonky Donkey']:

My donkey's legs are three  
That's why he's so wobbly  
My wonky donkey

My donkey's got on eye  
That why he can't play eye spy  
My winky wonky donkey

My donkey's very small  
He really isn't tall at all  
My dinky winky wonky donkey

My donkey drinks a jar  
At the local sleazy bar  
My honky tonky dinky winky wonky donkey

JAMES:

*How long have you lived in the valley?*

PW:

I was born in the valley, I was born in Cragg Vale and moved to Hebden Bridge a couple of years later, yeah.

JAMES:

*Was it the hippy sort of thing that brought – well not obviously it might not have been your decision to bring you here, but was it that sort of hippy, quaint, quiet life that brought you to Hebden Bridge?*

PW:

Not at all, not at all no, it was because my parents got a council house in Fairfield in Hebden Bridge that we actually moved there from Cragg Vale.

JAMES:

*And did this growing up in the council area, did that influence anything, bring back to your music? Is there anything that happened when you were growing up on the council estate? Has that influenced anything now, making references to things that happened?*

PW:

Yeah I mean, I suppose for a long time I thought songs should be something that's universal and it was only in the past few years when I focused on specific things and

thought you know 'it's okay to write a song about Mytholmroyd or Todmorden, even though most of the world don't know where they are'.

JAMES:

*Has there been any input in your music writing that shouldn't have been there, for example narcosis, that shouldn't have been there, or sort of a bad trip made you write a song about....your wonky donkey for example?*

PW:

Well 'Wonky Donkey' wasn't the result of a bad trip, although it may have caused a few. Because of my love of sixties psychedelia, that's reflected in what I write and I mean I would be lying to say that substances haven't influenced my work, but generally I've focused on the comedy aspects, you know, drugs as a taboo subject means that they're perfect for a funny song in the same way that anything, ...death, or you know, toilet humour, anything with an element of taboo in it automatically becomes funny.

[excerpt from a 'Day of the Hippy Dead]:

I bit my girl, she bit her aromatherapist  
Who ate the sandal-sucking foot of her reflexologist  
Who sautéed her chakra balancer  
And ate him off the bone  
And spit roast my astrologer  
Who really should have known

JAMES:

*So I take it all this sort of stuff goes on to your own albums?*

PW:

The songs that I've been writing in the last few years, I've recorded them at home and released them – well, you know, sold them myself at gigs and things, on little EPs. I've done about seven of them and am working on a new one that should be out fairly soon, but there's about seven of them that I've either sold them from Muse Music, Sid's record shop in Hebden Bridge, or sold myself at gigs.

JAMES:

*That's impressive. So seven EPs...the amount of bands that you see out there that have just sort of done one or two EPs, it just, obviously if you've got seven there is definitely a demand for your music, I mean I think it's great that people in this day and age of downloading music that they will still support local artists, playing their music and buying their music. Have you been releasing other stuff with 'The Ukrainians' and 'The Electric Brains'?*

PW:

Yeah, I mean 'The Ukrainians' have done several albums over the years. We released the latest one in spring this year, that's called 'Diaspora' that's been getting really, really good reviews.

[excerpt from a 'Ukrainians' song]

With *'The Electric Brains'* we've had a track on the vinyl compilation and we're planning to do some recording this winter, either for an album or for an EP, we're not sure about where and when but that's the plan for the winter anyway.

JAMES:

*It's impressive stuff, and obviously going back to 'The Ukrainians' with their eclectic sound and obviously you don't see many bands, especially sort of around this area, in the north of England, with such and odd...like I mentioned before – the sound, and obviously if anyone's listened to it, they've heard that 'The Ukrainians' isn't sung in English. Did you learn the language from studies abroad?*

PW:

Yeah I mean I learnt some Russian of course when I was living in Russia. With *'The Ukrainians'* I primarily play mandolin, electric mandolin. I do backing vocal, thankfully a lot of my backing vocals consist of 'di-di-di-di-di-di' that sort of stuff, but yeah, knowledge of Russian's helped me with learning some of the other backing vocals, but I mean singing in a foreign language, it's very interesting for music because it stops people in some way listening to the lyrics and if they don't understand the language they focus more on the sound of the words and what the music can bring.

[excerpt from a 'Ukrainians' song]

Several years ago I was in a band with Mick West again called *'The Babylonians'* and later Lennon McCarthy [sp] where the key thing about the band was every song we sang would be in a different language, so there'd be a song in Russian, a song in Ancient Egyptian, a song in Spanish, a song in Chinese and so on, every song in a different language, I think that was as far really as it could be taken.

JAMES:

*I've noticed a pattern in a lot of your stuff – you sort of go for the weirdest thing possible, something that no-one's ever done before, something that someone would remember you by. Is that where you hope to be? When that day comes, someone turns round and says 'I remember that guy – he sang all these different songs in a different language'.*

PW:

Unfortunately I think they're gonna say 'he's wonky donkey man'

[excerpt from 'Wonky Donkey']:

My donkey don't smell sweet  
It's not his breath and it's not his feet  
My stinky plinky plonky honky tonky dinky winky wonky donkey

My donkey wears girls' clothes  
Knickers bras and panty hose  
My kinky stinky plinky plonky honky tonky dinky winky wonky donkey

I suppose it's always trying to do something that hasn't been done before and that's always quite hard, so I mean with my solo stuff I try and think of myself as an anti-singer/songwriter so that I'm avoiding the usual songs about relationships and you know, how sensitive I am, and instead focusing on, you know, donkies, zombies, drug-addicted cats, and that kind of thing.

JAMES:

*Enjoying yourself.*

PW:

Yeah, yeah.

JAMES:

*Living life to its fullest. Do you do any sort of serious songs? Have you written anything that you think 'I have a lot of meaning behind this song' or do you prefer to write songs that are – that someone may come home to one night feeling in a really crappy mood and just go 'I wanna listen to something that's gonna cheer me up' and pop that on?*

PW:

Yeah, I mean the songs, even though they may be humorous, there's a sort of dark element to some of them because of the, you know, influence of horror films, but I think comedy songs in general get a bit of a bad rep – they're seen as being less of an art than say a serious song, but I think writing a funny song is just as hard or just easy as writing a serious song, and I think the art of the comic song generally is seen as second rate compared to so-called serious songs and...I suppose there's an element of satire and taking the p in a lot of the songs as well. I don't know, maybe I'm mischievous at heart and so there's always that element.

[excerpt from a song]:

To celebrate the heritage  
Of funky little Hebden Bridge  
A piece of sculpture was commissioned  
And in Saint George's Square positioned  
A mighty tool for cloth dissection  
A shiny steely proud erection  
And the children sing  
Rubber cub's cock, Rubber cub's cock,  
There in the square I saw rubber cub's cock

JAMES:

*Have you brought any of your influences of your own music writing to 'The Ukrainians'?*

PW:

Well they're for ever always telling me off for singing the backing vocals in a Russian accent and playing Greek style mandolin, so yeah, I suppose that is something that I've brought in and I mean 'The Ukrainians' has had such a fluid line-up over the

years that I think you know a lot of people have...so the band's changed over the years, different instruments have been added, yeah.

JAMES:

*How did you first start playing with 'The Ukrainians'?*

PW:

I joined for a tour of Poland in 1997 so that was my induction into the band. It was a ten day tour of Poland and that was an eye-opener because for the first few gigs, every gig was the biggest I'd ever played, so you know I was bricking it. The first gig had several hundred people in the audience and then the next one had several thousand people in the audience and then one of them was in a stadium so it was a real...you know it was the time when 'The Ukrainians' were big in Poland and folk rock generally was big in Poland, so that was certainly an experience, one that I'll never forget.

JAMES:

*What's the biggest crowd you've played for?*

PW:

It would probably be one of those from the first tour of Poland. It was a Ukrainian music festival on the border with Ukraine, it was in a football stadium, couldn't tell you how many thousands of people were there but

JAMES:

*Just many thousands. Talking of which, you say it was a Ukrainian musical festival. How do the Ukrainians like 'The Ukrainians'?*

PW:

How do the Ukrainians like?

JAMES:

*As in the actual people from the Ukraine.*

PW:

Okay right...people from the Ukraine are among the most hardcore fans I suppose that the band has, you know we've been to the Ukraine a couple of times. I went to the Ukraine with them last year and that was – that was a bizarre experience because it coincided with the worst floods for fifty years and a state of national emergency was declared so it was....it was very unfortunate really you know, everything got rained off almost, so yeah that wasn't a very good introduction to Ukraine unfortunately, but yeah, certainly the Ukrainians and Poles seem to be the band's most hardcore fans.

JAMES:

*You say that they are the most hardcore fans. Are these the ones that will turn up rain or shine, excusing the pun, or buy all the albums?*

PW:

Yeah, buy all the records and will travel from the other end of the country you know

to see the band, you know, come to several different shows, you know, follow the band round so yeah.

JAMES:

*Does playing as a part of 'The Ukrainians' have a sex appeal about it?*

PW:

Playing on stage to a lot of people, especially the style of music that 'The Ukrainians' play yeah, it definitely does, I suppose cos it's fast and furious a lot of the time and then sort of goes into sort of romantic sentimentality and then sort of drunken swagger and then goes all hell for leather again.

JAMES:

*Going back to your sort of three projects that you're on at the moment, what have you been doing with those so far this year and where have you been this year?*

PW:

With 'The Ukrainians' first we put out a new album called 'Diaspora' and a single, a version of Brahms 'Hungarian Dance' this year. We've done gigs to tour the album with, we've been to Holland and to Portugal to do festival there, we've just finished a mini tour of the UK, got back from London last night. With 'The Electric Brains' we've done several gigs, done quite a lot of gigs over the summer and we're planning to do a bit of recording, possibly for an EP over the winter time. With myself I've been carrying on writing and recording songs, this year I've released a couple of EPs – 'The Hebden Bridge Plastic Bag Preservation Society' and 'The Blue Side of Uranus' and I'm working on another EP of 1960's style death disc songs and I'm hoping that will be ready in the next month or so.

JAMES:

*Very impressive. It seems that your madness in writing the songs doesn't even stop at the titles of them. I think that's something you really don't see today. I think too many people take too many things too seriously, and I think that you seem to be a person that really just enjoys the lighter things of life.*

PW:

I mean I love humour in music, you know a lot of the early 'Pink Floyd' songs and Sid Barrett songs are funny, and the 'The Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band' and 'The Bonzo Dog Band' have always been favourites of mine, so yeah, I think music and humour go together very well.

[excerpt from a song]:

Who needs a prefrontal cortex anyway  
It only cause problems like schizophren-i-a  
Depression, anxiety, dependence on booze  
Get yourself labotomised, you've nothing to lose

JAMES:

*What are you currently listening to on your own sound system?*

PW:

At the moment I'm listening to 'Osmotantes', I got their new album a few weeks ago. 'Osmotantes' were a Brazilian tropicalia – I suppose they were sort of a Brazilian psychedelia from the late sixties and early seventies. I'm a big fan of 'Aphrodites Child' which were a Greek psychedelic prog rock band featuring Demis Roussos on bass guitar and Jon Vangelis on keyboards. I was listening to a bit of East European surf music today, I mean I really love obscure compilations of stuff that you don't find everyday, like East European surf or again comedy songs.

JAMES:

*How can we find out about more of this sort of stuff – more of this sort of – your aspects of music, the things you listen to and your own music?*

PW:

I mean...I'm always playing down at 'The Stubbing Wharf' open mic session on Wednesday nights, that's been going for seven years now and that's sort of one of the things that encouraged me to take up writing songs again and to try and write songs unlike other people are writing. I've got a Myspace page which is Myspace/paulweatherhead, although I can't say I'm very scrupulous in updating it. 'The Ukrainians' you can check out at 'The Ukrainians' website which is the-ukrainians.com and of course there are several albums available by 'The Ukrainians' as well. My own EPS are available from Muse Music in Hebden Bridge.

JAMES:

*Really there is plenty of places for us to pick your music from and I think personally myself I'm gonna be picking some of it up, and I'm hoping that anyone else listening will pick it up themselves, so I think we'll conclude our interview there and it's been very nice talking to you and I hope to see you around some time soon.*

PW:

Pleasure.

JAMES:

*Thank you.*

PW:

Thank you.

[Wonky Donkey song]:

My donkey just don't care  
He's always pissing in the air  
My sprinkly wrinkly kinky stinky plinky plonky honky tonky dinky winky wonky donkey  
[slowly] My sprinkly wrinkly kinky stinky plinky plonky honky tonky dinky winky wonky donkey

**[END OF TRACK 1]**