



MAVERICKS
THE WILD, THE WILLING AND THE NOT SO INNOCENT...

“Stuck in the past? Not me!”

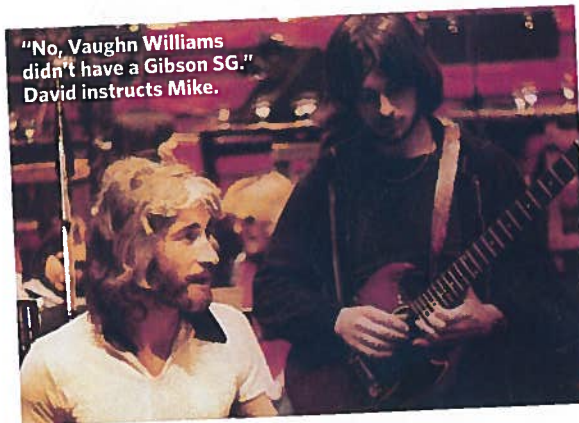
Canterbury scene, *Tubular Bells*, Barry Manilow and... dubstep? Composer/arranger **David Bedford** continues to surprise, even aged 73. **Sid Smith** gets the nose flute out...

“I had a 65th birthday concert given to me in 2002 by an orchestra called the Academy of St John’s. They told me they were going to put on my favourite composers as well as some of my own pieces. ‘Who would you like?’ they asked. So I said ‘Bach, Mozart and Brian Wilson. They asked ‘Who’s Brian Wilson?’” chuckles David Bedford.

He duly set about scoring classical arrangements of some of his favourite Wilson and Beach Boy tunes, including *God Only Knows*. Having successfully traversed the worlds of classical and popular music as a composer and arranger, he has no time for those who think these worlds should be kept apart. “I have a photo on my office wall of me shaking hands with Brian Wilson in 2003, having just presented him with an Ivor Novello award. I think he’s one of the great composers, regardless of genre. Full stop!”

One of the unsung heroes of the music industry is the humble arranger. This is a deceptively simple title for someone’s whose contribution is a strange and subtle mix of turning something good into something that can make the hairs on the back of your neck stand to attention. The best arrangers pull off that seemingly impossible trick of exerting a telling influence within a piece while remaining largely invisible to the listener. It’s a tricky tightrope to have to walk. “The important person is the composer,” he explains. “In that context

my job is to add things that the composer would like to hear, or hadn’t thought of using, to make



“No, Vaughn Williams didn’t have a Gibson SG.” David instructs Mike.

Moon and Jimmy Page. Bedford also worked with Harper in special concerts, conducting the orchestra, though this was sometimes not without incident. “There was a song called *Commune* (from *Valentine*) where Roy had put the capo on the wrong fret of his guitar. That meant when all the strings came in, they were a semi-tone sharp. It was a bit awkward because you can’t tell the strings to sight-read a semi-tone lower. So I gently tapped Roy on the shoulder and said ‘start again.’”

One track from the album stands

head and shoulders above the rest. *Twelve Hours Of Sunset* is Harper’s serenely poetic take about flying due west to Los Angeles, crossing time zones and, in effect, being suspended against a sunset that never seems to wane. Bedford’s arrangement for strings

and French horn exquisitely captures a yearning poignancy, the sense of being lost from loved ones and their ‘faraway smiles’. “What I liked about it was this feeling of timelessness and the concept behind the lyric. You obviously weren’t going to have strings rushing around doing semiquavers. So they’re very quiet, rich pads with a few slight discords in them, which the ear doesn’t really notice. The French horns just add a touch of colour every so often. I wanted to keep it really simple.” It’s that very simplicity and controlled restraint which

builds around the song into something substantial and significant in its own right but which never detracts from the core of Harper’s aching performance. “The song very close to me because I actually did

the song sound more interesting.”

Though he’s been involved in adding instrumental and choral icing onto the cake of numerous recordings by artists as different as Elvis Costello, Camel, a-ha, Madness, The Edgar Broughton Band, Kevin Ayers, Mike Oldfield and even Barry Manilow, it’s Bedford’s work for Roy Harper that provides some of the best examples of the delicate balancing act which good arrangers negotiate when adding their talent to a client’s recording.

1971’s *Stormcock* contains many exhilarating moments in their own right, but the dramatic lift that occurs in *Me And My Woman*, comes as a direct result of Bedford’s orchestral intervention, and undoubtedly supplies one of the album’s true high points.

Harper’s seventh studio album, *Valentine*, expanded Bedford’s role across the length and breadth of the record with some intricate and detailed writing. Launched at a special gig at The Rainbow theatre in Finsbury Park on February 14, 1974, the concert featured special guests such as Keith

“Around Star’s
End it was suggested to me that I use lower grade manuscript paper for working with rock musicians.”

David Bedford

David, at Herbie Flowers’ rockshop choir in 2009.

