



The Long Ryders circa 1986 with Sid, second right

on that first EP cover and then of course everyone's Mom said, "But you nice boys look so unhappy on the sleeve!"

Remember too, Melrose Avenue, now one hip clothing store after another, was a series of boarded up shops in the late '70s. But Flip started, that was the first second hand clothing shop, and it was started by these two guys, one of who was a Geordie who had been in bands like The Amen Corner. That was the first place in town a relatively young and low-income musician could get some cool threads. The Byrds were a great visual inspiration, as were The Standells and the Springfield.

SD: The Paisley Underground? When did you see this taking off and what are your feelings on the glory the movement has received?

SG: It is hard to believe there are books about The Paisley Underground now. Books, not articles. Most are written by young continental Europeans and I don't participate in them unless I have to. These young guys will get a fact from me I know to be true (as I was there) and they will tell me that I have it wrong. What do you say to that?

I can confirm Michael Quercio of The Three O'Clock [originally called Salvation Army] thought of the name. Even Alan of Creation Records talks about The Paisley Underground to this day, as does Bobby Gillespie.

The Paisley Underground was a bunch of people with the same records in their record collections socialising. Everyone had Beatles, Byrds, Stones, Who and Velvet Underground LPs in their homes and we were all hanging out at barbecues on Saturday or Sunday afternoons. It was a

social thing as much as a musical thing. Some folks started bands which emphasised The Byrds, some started bands which emphasised The Beatles, some started bands which played up The Velvet Underground, but all these bands were your friends and you wanted all of this. They were to be successful and happy. This is why The Long Ryders' *Native Sons* LP had on the back "The Long Ryders wish success and happiness to all bands".

The original Paisley Underground was The Rain Parade, The Salvation Army (later Three O'Clock), The Dream Syndicate and The Bangles. This was in an early article in either *The LA Times* newspaper or *The LA Weekly* – can't remember now. Then Green On Red and The Long Ryders were included which made it more accurate. But it started getting silly when True West of Davis, California and Naked Prey from Arizona were included. As much as I liked those bands, and I truly did, they were not part of the original scene, which was social as much as anything.

They were very heady, happy days. I remember from about '84 sometime to early '86, you could not buy a rock music magazine or newspaper in the USA without an article on either The Long Ryders specifically – or at least someone we knew and were close to musically, emotionally and spiritually.

SD: What changes came for the band with the release of *Native Sons* – your first full-length, released in '84? And what success did the record bring?

SG: *Native Sons* was slowly accepted, it was not a big hit at first. I remember our friend Chris Morris giving it a very average review in the old *LA Reader*. This nearly broke my heart. He wrote how our EP was

much, much better. But touring helped spread the word and the word grew and grew and sales got pretty heavy in the USA for an indie record. *Native Sons* was soon the #4 LP on the College Radio/alternative charts in late '84 or early '85 and that was a big deal back then.

Then our manager John Guarnieri [who used to work for Miles Copland at Faulty and later IRS Records] started doing licensing deals for the record around the world. With permission of the US label we cut the album for, of course! Next thing we knew, we were released in France, Japan and then on Demon/Edsel/Zippo in the UK thanks to Elvis Costello thinking we were good. To this day I thank him, Lew Difford [Chris' brother], Nick Lowe, Andrew Lauder and especially Jake Riviera for being so good to us. They were the first guys to understand the cover was *Stampede* by the Springfield without us having to tell them it was. Pete Frame thought it was the greatest cover ever!

Henry Lewy was a real find. We should have kept making albums with him. It was a mistake not to. He had done the Burritos, all the great Joni Mitchell albums, Barbara Streisand; he had worked with Peter Fonda on *Easy Rider*. I miss him very much, he was a real European gent transplanted to California, and he and I were the ones who cooked up the idea of contacting his pal (and my hero) Gene Clark.

SD: So... what was it like working with Gene Clark on the song "Ivory Tower"? I recall you telling me how you came across Gene in the '80s. Can you reiterate?

SG: It is hard for young, hip Brits to believe this, but Gene Clark was a total nobody by the early '80s. He was a forgotten man, had sold his publishing and was living in a

room – just one room – which he rented from the old Byrds manager Jim Dickson.

Anyway Gene was easy to find. It wasn't like he was hiding from screaming girls or anything. Somehow we made the call and offered him a humble \$75 to sing with us. He was broke and jumped at the chance, asking for cash when the deed was done. He came down and looked and sounded like poop. I mean, I remember one of the guys saying, "Jesus, he sounds like Wild Man Fisher." After about a pot of really strong, really hot coffee Gene started singing like Gene Clark. I asked him could he sing a verse on his own and he looked at the lyrics and said, "That wouldn't make any sense in the song" and that might be true but who would care?

SD: You also lived with Eric Burdon in the mid-80s. Any tall tales?

SG: I have a ton of Eric stories – you're making me want to write an autobiography here. One time he and I went to Barney's Beanyery to drink beer. It was only a 15-minute or so walk from our house. We get there and Eric says, "Let's drink Sake." I don't know how strong it is so we start drinking and were singing along LOUDLY to every song on the jukebox with Eric mentioning Newcastle Brown Ale in every song. "Sitting On The Dock Of The Bay" was "Sitting On The Dock Of The Bay Drinking Newcastle Brown". "Satisfaction" became "I Can't Get No Newcastle Brown Ale" and so on. Eric tells me the porcelain beaker and little cups you drink Sake in are complimentary. I am so drunk I believe him. We wanna leave, it is about midnight. Eric has put Sake cups and pitchers down my shirt, in my jeans, rolled up in my socks... I am walking out the door and the big tough bouncer hears the clinking sound and goes, "What you got there?" and a Sake cup falls out my trouser leg on the floor. Right then Eric pushes me HARD from the back and I go flying forward and he yells, "LEG IT!" I had a bouncer running after me and all the Sake cups and pitchers are clanging together inside my clothing. I got home about a half hour after Eric had pushed me out the Barney's Beanyery door to find him watching TV in the living room with a big grin on his face. He had no Sake cups or pitchers on him as he knew you had to give them back and that they were not free.

SD: In '87 The Long Ryders were signed to Island and released *Two Fisted Tales*. You split in December of that year. What happened and what went wrong?

SG: *State Of Our Union* came out and did OK but not really any better than *Native Sons* and this really blew our minds as *State Of Our Union* had "Looking For Lewis & Clark" on it and all this success in Europe. But it never even made the American charts! So 18 months later we

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did *Two Fisted Tales* and while [it had] a lousy cover it is probably the "Great Lost Long Ryders Album" and I wish people would get into it more. In the USA folks thought it was too polished a sound but we were trying to do that to get on the radio, get some airplay and of course subsequently sell some records.

SD: You'd already written the critically acclaimed *Gram Parsons: A Musical Biography* in '85, so what were your feelings when The Long Ryders quit? What did you want to do?

SG: When The Long Ryders disbanded, it was awful. Tom quit first, we did a tour without him, and then Stephen told me in Canada he didn't want to do it anymore. Greg and I were asked for another album by Island Records and we met and talked. Like fools, like total idiots we told Island no thanks. He and I should have gotten a couple of players and made another Long Ryders album as they asked. That was stupid to turn them down. Stupid. I knew I wanted to play music so why not make the album? Youth is wasted on the young... that is what I say.

SD: In '89 after a period away from playing you formed The Coal Porters, who are still very much alive to this day. The early records continue the rootsy rock vibe of The Long Ryders, and are indeed recommended to anyone that liked what you did with them... but you were now living in the UK

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peddling Americana to an indie audience. How did you acclimatise to living in London after the sun and warmth of LA?

SG: The early Coal Porters were kinda like The Long Ryders, this is very true. We made some great records but put out silly covers when they were released and that hurt us a lot. I never made that mistake again. I moved from L.A. a place I love to bits, to live in London because I was romancing a British singer who I later married... but alas the marriage did not last. Peddling Americana from north London is NOT easy, I can tell you that. I like London, but in a way I have never felt a part of London. I cannot really say why.

SD: Producing Lindisfarne apparently inspired you to go acoustic... and for the last 10 or so years The Coal Porters have become a major draw on the bluegrass circuit and well received by the music press. How has this been for you and the ever-evolving band?

SG: The Coal Porters have had a problem with a stable line-up – dunno why. We pay pretty well! Neil Robert Herd has been with me [for] over a decade but the others are all within the last three years.

We do songs by people like Gene Clark and Neil Young so folks won't think we are gonna be singing about rubbish like "Dear Old Mother" or "The Old Village Bridge" when they come see us. Right now The Coal Porters turn down work, this is the first time I have done that since The Long Ryders! Playing electric music, we were always hunting for gigs and now we get so many offers we cannot do them all. So going acoustic has definitely been a good thing for us, no question about it. We have played everything from Glastonbury to Chelsea Hospital, from the Stagecoach Festival in southern California to crazy little town festivals in Italy. So I have no complaints with The Coal Porters today!

SD: Finally, Sid as writer. Sid as musician. Sid as survivor. How do you feel in middle age about your career choice (after studying law)?

SG: I don't have a regular job. I am a musician, a writer, a sometimes broadcaster... all this keeps me able to buy a new shirt when I want and to pay the rent. I am grateful for this, very grateful. Walking out of the law school examination in LA was one of the best and most courageous things I have ever done. But the world does not need another American lawyer. That is a fact.

Sometimes the cupboard is pretty bare around here. But that is the Arts for you. You enter the Arts to make money and you are deluding yourself. The chances of you being Dylan, Picasso, Hemingway or Coppola are sooo stacked against you, all you can do is try, try, try to make the best art you can. And this is what I have tried to do, to make Art (be it books or records or radio shows or whatever) that people would be proud to own, that was worth their hard-earned money.

This certainly keeps me on my toes, but it is a helluva weird way to go through life. But then I've been on the front cover of *The Sunday New York Times*' Arts & Leisure section, I've headlined to 100,000 people at a festival in Spain, I had Dolly Parton read one of my scripts out late one night on BBC Radio 2. Remembering high times like those keeps me going through the low valleys I sometimes have to tread. And I am gonna tell you all about it one day when I paint my masterpiece, when I write my memoirs.

Shelter From The Storm (Sid's account of Dylan's *Rolling Thunder Tour*) is out now on *Jawbone* (www.jawbonepress.com). The full, unedited transcript of this interview is on our site for further reading.