

A Conversation with Andy Partridge
by Frank Goodman (11/2006/Puremusic.com)

Although their notoriety seems not to have popped up on everyone's radar, those of us lucky enough to count XTC as one of our bands seem to agree that they were one of the most musical and important acts of the eighties. Their post punk roots, their pop soul that time brought to bear, and their fierce originality generated a repertoire of song unlike any other in rock history. They had their influences, but processed them uniquely.

They are known for their reluctance to break the small town ties of their origin in Swindon, an English railroad town whose "magic roundabout" may be a dubious claim to fame, especially since it brought us not only XTC, but Gilbert O'Sullivan and jazz sensation Jamie Cullum. (However, you get can a magic roundabout t-shirt at swindonweb.com/life/lifemagi0.htm.)

In fact, their view of the world is seen so keenly through the looking glass that is Swindon, they are to pop music what small town sleuth Miss Jane Marple is to mystery. She rarely needed to go outside the hedgerows of St. Mary Mead to solve the most enigmatic of murders, or to simply find examples of the many dark cupboards of the human condition.

Although drummer Terry Chambers and especially guitarist and keyboardist Dave Gregory made long-standing contributions that are forever a part of XTC's colorful history, the songwriters and nucleus of the band are bassist Colin Moulding and guitarist Andy Partridge. Although undeniably, many of the greatest and most successful songs belong to Moulding, Partridge is by far the more prolific as well as infamous, being by turns more high-energy and socially withdrawn. Andy's paralyzing relationship with stage fright caused them to quit touring as early as 1982, when things were really beginning to heat up for the band.

A dozen full-length releases, mostly for Virgin Records, chronicle the story better than the two books available on the band ever could, although *Song Stories* by Neville Farmer and *Chalkhills and Children* by Chris Twomey were each, in their way, satisfying for the enthusiast.

Personally, this writer finds the legacy of this particular English band so awesome as to be one of the great pop puzzles of this life. That a band, never having left their somewhat dreary small town English roots, could create a body of music so refined and timeless, miles above the milieu in a corner where no one will ever be able to touch it, is a humbling and inspiring testament to the creativity of the untethered soul. Long live XTC.

Andy's latest venture is Ape House Records, an artist-centric label that sells a small catalog of XTC-related merchandise as well as the music and videos of incredible artists like Veda Hille, Peter Blegvad, and The Milk & Honey Band. We were greatly impressed by what we heard from all these acts, all handpicked by Andy. However, the most important product at the moment is a remarkably artistic and handsomely packaged

collection of Andy's outtakes, demos, and rarities of all kinds, called *Fuzzy Warbles*. There are nine discs total, and a great set of liner notes by Andy about his personal history with recording. For fans of Partridge and XTC, it is an extraordinary look inside a very private person's musical life, skeletons of songs that became landmarks, alternate versions of songs, and demos of gems not yet brought to larger life. Check out the fantastic look of this set at the Ape website.

Had it come from a star that you see and hear everywhere, or one who has his tour buses pulling up to his driveway, such a set might seem mildly interesting. But in this case, it's a lot more like J.D. Salinger 's edited diary entries going up for sale.

For that matter, it's uncommon enough to have or to see a conversation with Andy Partridge in the press, it's just not his way. But, thanks to the happy occasion of the release of *Fuzzy Warbles* (which can be purchased in single volumes or as a box set), we are very happy indeed to bring you such a conversation here.

Puremusic: Hello, Andy. How are you?

Andy Partridge: Hey, Frank, okay.

PM: Ah, it's lovely to speak to you. I'm calling from Nashville, as you may know.

AP: Ah, I can hear the twang of all those country guitars from here.

[laughter]

PM: Yeah, no end to them, for sure. Too few cuts, too many songwriters.

AP: [laughs] Is it still like a big thing, are people still flocking to Nashville?

PM: Even though country is in the crapper, people are still coming by the droves.

AP: Yeah, Nashville is never going to lose that cache of being the place for country.

PM: Right. And also the place to go if you're a songwriter, because country is still the genre where people are cutting more outside tunes than any other. One's got a better shot at landing a tune with an artist than you do in any other genre.

AP: Yeah. Maybe they haven't got into this greedy thing the pop world has got into where they insist that the artist has to co-write with you, which is really hampering in some cases, because it's like some footballer--like David Beckham is great at playing football, and then there's some kid who can't play football, and they strap this kid to David Beckham's leg, and they say to him, "Okay, now play football great like you usually do." Well, he's going to be hampered with a kid strapped to his leg so that the kid can take half the glory. Do you see what I mean?

PM: And in fact, that's what's gone on in Nashville in a major way. To get on a record these days, you almost have to write with the artist.

AP: Ah, that's such a scam.

PM: Oh, yeah. It's awful, because half of them can't write their way out of a paper bag.

AP: Exactly. How can you do your football with this kid tied to your leg? It's insane.

PM: And you're going to write the same love song with someone who's 20, and you've been married twice? I don't think so.

[laughter]

AP: I'll tell you, my concerns at 20 were not what they are coming up for 53.

[laughter]

PM: It's interesting that after all those years under the thumb of Virgin, now you're the head honcho of your own label [Ape House Records].

AP: Yeah, I guess so. But I can't see it ever making me enough money to have a fleet of airlines. I can't see the tail fin with the Ape face on it somehow.

[laughter]

PM: Although it is a hell of a logo. It would look good on a plane.

AP: Ape, as a company, is not making any money. In fact, the bank statement I saw for Ape last week has exactly two and a half thousand pounds profit in four years.

PM: Are you kidding me?

AP: That's not great going. So I do it for the love of it.

PM: Ah, see, I had no idea. Because I know that there are still so many XTC people out there on the globe that if the right thing is offered to them, I'm sure there's money to be made. And I really liked *Fuzzy Warbles*. I think it's a great offering. But I think that there are all kinds of possibilities.

AP: Did you see the collector's album?

PM: What do you mean, the *Apple Box*?

AP: No, no. The collector's album that goes with all the *Fuzzy Warbles* stuff.

PM: Well, I've only seen pictures of it, because what I got as a journalist was an advance copy, your data disc, with all the folders and files.

AP: Oh, okay, yeah.

PM: But I've heard the 100 songs.

AP: Yeah, yeah. Believe it or not, the data discs were a lot cheaper to make than sending everybody a review copy of the box set. Sending out review copies probably cost about sixty, seventy dollars a time, so--

PM: Exactly. So, yeah, I didn't quibble about it, because I was happy to get the files, and to hear the songs. I mean, what I found really fascinating were all the demos for the songs that did end up getting cut.

AP: Sure, that's part of the thrill, I guess, for people--just hearing kind of ghosts of songs that were or were not ever made flesh.

PM: Or, to people who think that way, the skeletons of songs are very interesting. Listening to "1000 Umbrellas" on acoustic guitar, I thought, "Wow, I can hear that voicing, I know how he plays it now, right..."

[laughter]

AP: Well, if you want to know, I can tell you the shapes, if you want to play it.

PM: And even, in some cases--like you said, "Well, here's the tuning, it's D6 with a drop D, and here's how it goes, and we're off." It's the track called "Mermaid Explanation."

AP: Oh, right, right. Well, I have to do that for myself, you see, because I don't write music. And any way I can remember what the hell I'm doing--I have to sing stuff into cassette machines or tell myself the tuning, or usually tell myself the chords I'm going to play, in my own kind of language, because I don't know the names of a lot of the chords I play. So any way I can get that down is good, because I have no musical training, or anything like that.

PM: I hear you. Yeah, they won't let me do charts for my songs. They say, "No, no Frank. Just play the song. We'll write the chart. You're just going to screw it up anyway."

AP: Yeah, exactly. I mean, it means nothing to me, they're just sparrows on telegraph wires. That's not my language.

PM: [laughs] For a company that allegedly may not make too much money yet, I think that Ape is pretty impressive in its cutting edge offerings, the ringtones, and content cards, and downloadable videos and all that.

AP: Well, I'd like to think that also some of the artists I can bring to people--like Veda Hille, or the Milk & Honey Band, or Peter Blegvad--are very special. And I've got some more people I'd like to take under my wing. And I'd like to think that the artists don't get a rip-off deal; they get the best deal that they can get, which is 50/50.

PM: Wow.

AP: The artist will make 50 percent of the net profit. And as a company, I probably end up taking fifteen percent, because we have to pay the money back into the promoting of the thing, and so on and so forth. So the artist does not get ripped off on Ape, which is probably why I'm not making a load of with money with it. But I'm just keen to bring music that excites me to other people.

PM: In fact, I downloaded the "Queen of the May" video of Veda Hille, and I thought that was incredible. [<http://www.ape.uk.net/acatalog/Videos.html>]

AP: Oh, that's great. Yeah, I love the way Veda thinks of music. She comes at it totally in a different way to most people.

PM: She's astounding. And that incredible animation by--how do you say her name? Eun-Ha Paek?

AP: Something like that. I never got it right. I have the funny feeling it's either an Eskimo name or--I don't think you can call them "Eskimos," can you? "Eskimo" is kind of the "nigger" of the Northern Lights world.

PM: [laughs] Well, isn't she Korean?

AP: What's that?

PM: Isn't she Korean? I thought she was from Seoul.

AP: Is she Korean? Oh, okay. For some reason I had it in my head it was an Eskimo name or an Inuit name or something.

PM: Right, well, it's got the Inuit ring, if there is such a thing.

AP: Exactly. And with an Inuit ring, it's got to be very fishy, I can tell you. It's a good little video. And like I said, it's something that--any way that we can bring stuff to people to turn them onto artists who I think are good, but the main labels are ignoring them.

PM: Oh, to say the least.

[Veda Hille (vey-da hill-ie) is a Canadian singer-songwriter and composer, born and based in Vancouver, B.C. She leads her own band and is also a member of two other

groups, Duplex! and The Fits. Find out more about Veda at vedahille.com or visit her myspace page. Animator/designer/illustrator Eun-Ha Paek (un-ha bek) was born in Seoul, Korea, spent her childhood in Iran, Thailand, and Los Angeles, attended highschool in New Jersey, studied Animation at Rhode Island School of Design, lived for most of her twenties in San Francisco, and currently resides in Brooklyn, NY. She's a member of the art collective Milky Elephant (<http://www.milkyelephant.com>). Enjoy samples of her work at eun-ha.com.]

PM: And not only would we like to review Veda's record, but we'd like to review that great-sounding CD by the Milk & Honey Band.
[<http://www.themilkandhoneyband.co.uk>]

AP: Oh, that's a wonderful album. When I heard that stuff, I thought, wow, this is like a great secret. Who knows about this group? They don't play live very often. They record their stuff at home. They have a tape machine and a mixing desk and stuff, in the writer's house, and three of them get together, and they make this wonderful music.

PM: Yeah, it's really great.

AP: And who knew? It's one of the best-kept secrets around.

PM: It's unbelievable. And that's the kind of thing we're dedicated to as a webzine, with our million hits, we like to bring the under-the-radar stuff above ground and say, "Well, have you heard this one?"

AP: Yeah. I think that's important, because nobody can get away from the stuff that's rammed down their throats in the big media. And the stuff that's rammed down their throats is always the least interesting stuff. It's like porridge, porridge, porridge, and sometimes you want a bit of beef.

PM: [laughs] And how about that track with Peter Blegvad, "Galveston"? That was fantastic.

AP: Oh, Peter is a genius. Really. I really admire Peter. I've known him for many years, and he's a real renaissance man. I mean, he can do so many things. He did a cartoon strip in the independent paper in England called *Leviathan*, which all of them are collected together in one book. And I mean, it's stunningly out there in the kind of stuff that he deals with. Matt Groening is a big fan of Peter's cartoons. [see some at leviathan.co.uk] Peter has made albums, he does lectures, he's done installations, he does artworks, he's written books. I mean, he's just the renaissance man. I really admire him.

PM: And does he live in England?

AP: Yeah, he lives in London.

PM: And so he's an old buddy. Yeah, we've got to get up with his records.

AP: But he's a New Yorker, originally, but moved over to England, I think in his teens. He's on so many good records.

PM: Wow. But is it fair to say that, first and foremost, Ape is kind of poised to proliferate this box of outtakes, demos, and recently finished things, *Fuzzy Warbles*?

AP: Yeah--well, the big drive now is to--we have two things coming up, the collector's album, which is all of the *Fuzzy Warbles* stuff, you can either get it all in this beautiful box which looks like a stamp album, or you can buy the individual volumes separately. I want people to get whatever combination they're happy with. I don't want them to think I'm making them buy stuff twice, if they already have, say, four of the *Fuzzy Warbles*, or whatever. They can buy any combination they want. So we're working on that. And then we have another project coming up in January, which is an album, a double disc of totally improvised music with myself, Barry Andrews, the original keyboardist in XTC--

PM: Right.

AP: --and drummer Martyn Barker. We did a double disc of purely improvised music. And we said, "Look, we're not going to discuss this stuff, we're not going to talk about the keys, we're not going to talk about the feel of it, we're not going to talk about any of the tempos of anything. We're just going to book a studio, go in, and as soon as he's rolling we'll start and see what comes out."

PM: Wow.

AP: And we did three days, and in three days we got about eight hours worth of playing. Out of that eight hours, an hour and a half we think is really rather special. So that's coming out in January, that's called *Monstrance*.

PM: And so no bass--just keyboard, guitar, and drums.

AP: No bass. No overdubs, no bass, no other instruments, no vocals. It was just Barry on keyboards, myself on electric guitar, and Martyn on drums. And it was just, *okay, ready, go!* And some of the stuff that came out really surprised us.

PM: Unbelievable. I mean, for a guy who admittedly is not a writer of music or sparrows on the wires, to just get out there with his guitar and improvise. That's very interesting.

AP: Well, it's something that I've wanted to do ever since I was a teenager, because my musical background is like a real schizophrenic sort of double rail on the track. One rail is what you'd call pretty straight kind of pop music, I guess, with maybe a psychedelic twinge to it, Beatles, Small Faces, Kinks, Rolling Stones, that kind of thing, kind of classic '60s bands. And then the other rail on the track is really the more avant-garde or out there side of jazz. I had a big thing for people like Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, John

Coltrane, Han Bennink, Lifetime--or even Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band, I guess, would fall in that sort of camp as well.

PM: Who I was a great fan of, as well.

AP: So with me, my musical upbringing was always a tension between the very straight, very accessible, and the really out there.

PM: And sometimes your penchant for the very out there would show up gloriously in just the freedom in the melodic part of the writing. And the chords would just go wherever they--

AP: Sure, yeah, the desire to bust all the barriers open with the melody there.

PM: I mean, that's what really set XTC apart immediately is that like yeah, well, don't worry about the usual harmony you've been hearing on the radio, because here's our song, and it's quite a bit different.

AP: But the jazzers did that, the great jazzers did that. They said, "Key, great. The key is for breaking, the key is for busting." And that's what I really like. I like, here's the key of the song, okay, the melody is going to bust it, the chords are going to bust it, the rhythm is going to bust it. And that's creativity. Creativity is thinking wrongly.

PM: Now, when you think about something like this exciting project with Barry Andrews and Martyn Barker coming out, it leads me to wonder, well, suppose there were just casual videos of Andy sitting around with his guitar, or with a couple of buddies and just playing some songs. I mean, doesn't everybody think that you could sell the hell out of that on the web? Hell yes!

AP: Yeah, probably. But I guess--I mean, I've got to be honest with you, I have a real aversion to being seen. It's almost a--

PM: Even on film?

AP: Yeah. I hate being photographed, and I hate being filmed. But despite that, Barry and I today were talking about the possibility of doing some live improvised broadcasts in the new year. So people could tune in and watch maybe two hours, and it'd be completely brand new, off the cuff. We don't know how it's going to go, nor do they, and it's filmed.

PM: Wow. Well, that's exciting. I hope that comes around.

AP: Yeah, me, too, because I kind of like the idea of that.

PM: Yeah, I'll be tuned in.

AP: It's really fresh for me, because for years and years I've been looking for the perfectly interesting stimulating song structure, and it's kind of like architecture, you can't be too free with it. But you can just soar like the bird when you're improvising. And the thrill of it is you don't really know where you're going.

PM: Yeah, if you can just disengage your mind, you're in such better shape, just let your hands do it.

AP: Yeah.

PM: I was concerned to read, though, about some mixing accident on that album that left you with a case of tinnitus and damaged hearing.

AP: Oh, boy!

PM: How did that happen?

AP: I would not wish that on my worst enemy.

PM: What kind of a mixing accident?

AP: Well, we had an engineer who was kind of clumsy. He was a nice enough fellow, but he was kind of clumsy. And he recorded a lot of earth buzz [that's English for ground hum, I believe] and stuff on some drum tracks, which we were all upset about, because it's stuff you can't do again. It's a one take, and that's it.

PM: Right.

AP: And we electronically cleaned up the buzz. And I was just checking to see whether we'd done a good job. And I was listening to a piece of silence on the recording, on headphones with the mixing desk at full volume to make sure that the buzz had gone.

PM: Right.

AP: And he was messing with the computer when he shouldn't have been, and he hit a wrong button. And he sent the sound of the snare drum at full volume--

PM: Oh no!

AP: --into my ears. I mean, the top of the mixing desk at full. Really as loud as you can go. My first thought was--after I kind of regained my senses, having visually blacked out--but my first thought was, "Christ, my headphones are so expensive, that's got to have fucked them up." And then I noticed that I could just hear this [whistles in a piercing fashion] sound constantly in both my ears. And oh, that was bad. That was twenty-four hours a day, this screaming, humming, whistling noise in your head. So for the last few

months I've been spending every morning sitting in a hyperbaric oxygen chamber, which is like--if you don't know what it is--

PM: No.

AP: --it's like a diving bell. It's a big heavy iron sort of diving bell shape, with little porthole windows. And you go and sit in there, and they pressurize the air in there to the equivalent of you're like 33 feet under the ocean. And then you breathe pure oxygen for an hour through a mask. And then they depressurize you and bring you up again. And it's taken the volume of this screaming feedback down by about fifty percent.

It's a real pain in the ass to do it, because it takes up so much of each day. But I'm a desperate man, and I have to do it, because my hearing has been very, very damaged. And the worst thing is this screaming whistling tinnitus, which now that I know what it is, I would not wish it as a torture for anyone.

PM: Damn!

AP: Yeah. Within the first week of that incident happening, it's the only time in my life I've ever had suicidal thoughts, like as a way of, "I've got to stop this noise." You know?

PM: I can't imagine.

AP: Yeah, it's really tough. And I'm really being very optimistic about it, because if I didn't sort of go overboard on the optimism, I think I'd have checked into a lunatic asylum right now.

PM: And I think it's a big factor in getting healed, anyway, is just to keep a real positive edge on it.

AP: Oh, sure. But this treatment is kind of revolutionary, this hyperbaric oxygen treatment. The German Army discovered it, apparently, in World War II. They found that a lot of their soldiers firing machine guns and rifles and stuff with no ear protection, they were getting these traumatic tinnitus events. But you know what the Germans were like, they were just, "Let's see what happens if we do this. Oh, his head's exploded. Maybe that was a leettle too much."

PM: Yeah, turn it down bit. [laughs]

AP: So obviously they stuck some soldiers in a pressure chamber and gave them oxygen. And the soldiers said that the tinnitus was going down. So yeah, it's a little bit of a revolutionary type principle. It's never going to get rid of it, but if it keeps it down, I can function.

PM: Wow. And I read also of a damaged tendon in the left hand. How did that occur?

AP: I've had the year from hell! [laughs] You know, have I pissed off God with that song ["Dear God"]? Maybe. Who knows?

[laughter]

AP: Dear Allah, I've obviously upset somebody. But I'd literally just got this *Monstrance* album done, all the playing finished, and woke up one morning and my hand didn't feel good. And the tip of my left hand ring finger was sort of hanging. I couldn't make it sort of go straight. And I thought, uh-oh, I've busted my ring finger in the night, banged it on the headboard or rolled on it, or something. But it didn't hurt. And I thought, "This is weird. It doesn't hurt, but I can't move it." And I went up to the hospital, and it was, "Oh, you've busted the tendon. It would have been good if you'd have busted the bone, because that takes five weeks to mend. But if you bust a tendon, that's going to be about five, six months."

PM: Oh! And what did they have to do, put it in a cast or something?

AP: I went to a hand specialist in London, because local hospital just said, "Come back in six weeks, and we'll take a look at it." Which is really the wrong thing, because you have to have a kind of a special splint made that pushes the tip up and back, so it can set more like a conventional finger shape again.

So yeah, on the health front, it's been a shit year. It's been pretty good for other things. But yeah, I'm really being tested this year. And weirdly, the two injuries, one was the finger that does all the work on the guitar, and the other was my ears.

PM: Yeah, the two things you need the most.

AP: Exactly.

PM: But I guess being able to take all the bits from various years and tie them all up in this collection, there must have been a satisfaction to that before all that stuff went wrong.

AP: Yeah, yeah. I was enjoying putting together the *Fuzzy Warbles*, in any case. I mean, the reason I did the *Fuzzy Warbles* series was a case of I was sick of being bootlegged.

PM: Ah.

AP: I was finding out that people were getting bootlegs of my demos and stuff. And bootleggers would even send me stuff. They would say, "Yeah, I just pressed up 1,000 of these albums of your demos, and thought you might like one, ha ha."

PM: Jeez...

AP: And it was really pissing me off, big time. And I thought to myself, "Well, obviously people want these things, and bootleggers are doing them. So I'm going to bootleg myself better than anyone else can." So it's really a case of if anyone is going to bootleg me, I can do it so much better. I've got stuff they're never going to have, I've got first-generation copies, I can remix and clean up old recordings. I've got thousands and thousands of hours of cassettes of run-throughs, rehearsals, practices, ideas. If there's any one person who can bootleg me, it's going to be me.

PM: Yeah. And for people who can't get enough, and there are plenty of us, it's a treasure trove. It's a really amazing collection.

I was reading a book that you guys did with Neville Farmer, *Song Stories*, recently.

AP: Oh, right, okay.

PM: I was amazed to see--

AP: Well, yeah, I'm not--you can tell by my reaction I'm not on fire with either of the books that have been written about us, actually.

PM: Right. Well, I think one rarely is.

AP: One of these days somebody is going to write a good one, but I think the two that exist are not great.

PM: In the one that I read, I was amazed to see the friend of mine who turned me onto XTC mentioned, and that was Scott Thunes.

AP: Oh, right! Seriously, you know Scott?

PM: Yeah. We were playing in bands in northern California together just prior to his Zappa days.

AP: Right. Have you suffered the wrath of Scott?

PM: Oh, yeah!

[laughter]

PM: I mean, when you mentioned in the book, "Yeah, he was a very musical person, but a guy you could get into an argument with right away," I said, "That's my boy."

AP: Oh, I'll tell you, you could get into a fight with him at the drop of the hat.

PM: He was a contrary genius, and a decidedly argumentative person.

AP: Yeah, I'm surprised his nose was still a sort of dimensional shape, really.

PM: [laughs] I won't print this...he was brilliant, and quite a good friend to me, but could be his own worst enemy sometimes.

AP: No, you can print it if you like. Musically, he's very talented.

PM: [laughs] In the Neville Farmer book, I found the accounts of celebrity diehard fans interesting, the sadly departed River Phoenix, and Keanu Reeves--

AP: Yeah, they were sort of hanging around--River Phoenix was hanging around during the making of *Oranges and Lemons*. I had no concept of who the hell this smelly kid was.

PM: Wow.

AP: Because he just really stunk, and he looked like a bum off the street.

PM: Unbelievable.

AP: He was in a filthy, grungy checked shirt and jeans that were just held together by the dirt. And I had to say to people, "Who the fuck is that dirty kid over there in the lounge, and why is he here every day?"

PM: [laughs]

AP: And it was like, "Oh, that's River Phoenix, the actor." "Really?" I didn't know who he was. And I approached him and said, "Oh, so you're an actor, are you?" And he was extremely nervous. I think we were his favorite band.

PM: Wow.

AP: And the irony of it was, every day that he came in, I'd have many, many conversations with him, and most of the conversations would get around to drugs, and how awful they were, and it was him telling me.

PM: Ahh.

AP: Because I'm not a big drug fan, I'm not interested in drugs. But no, it was him--we were concurring that drugs were for losers. And what's the next I hear is that that's how he went.

PM: Yeah, big time. So unfortunate.

But it led me to wonder that you, as a band, and you and Colin probably had a lot of friends and fans among the glitterati and the literati, being the kind of band that XTC is.

AP: Yeah, you hear about stuff occasionally. Like I think Mike Meyers is a fan. I think what's his name, the voice of Mr. Burns, who plays bass in Spinal Tap--

PM: Harry Shearer.

AP: Right. I'm sure there are a few. Kiefer Sutherland, apparently, is a big fan.

PM: Really? That raises my opinion of him, as well.

AP: Yeah, I don't like his dad much, I think his dad is just a sort of damaged old hippie.

PM: [laughs] Really? That's funny.

AP: Well, every film he's in, you think, okay, just somebody remind him it's not f***ing *M.A.S.H.*

PM: You know what I loved him in, as Die Nadel in the *Eye of the Needle*. He's pretty good in that, when he was the German spy doing the silent killing and all that. He was hot there.

AP: Oh, right. But he has a terrible Irish accent when he's in--what are those war films where he plays some Irish agent or something?

PM: [laughs]

AP: Please.

PM: He's got a terrible Irish accent? [laughs]

AP: He really does. And he's playing the same role as in *M.A.S.H.*, but with an Irish accent, a brain-damaged Irish accent. Donald Sutherland is not one of my favorite actors.

PM: What is Colin up to? He's no part of Ape, right? But he is--

AP: No. Somebody else was asking me that this afternoon, actually, what the hell is Colin up to these days. And to be truthful, I think he's really trying to take himself out of music at the moment. He called me a couple of months back, and it's the last time I spoke to him. He said, "I've got something to tell you." And I thought, uh-oh, stand by. And he said, "Look, I've not been writing any songs." I said, "Yeah." I just assumed it was like a writer's block thing or something. He said, "Well, I'm really not interested in writing any more songs."

PM: Wow.

AP: And he said, "I'm not listening to music, and I'm not buying music. I just don't care about music anymore, so I'm not going to be bothered with music anymore." And I

thought, "Oh, well, he's just sick of this writer's block." I said, "Look, don't worry about it. Just leave it for a while, and before you know it, a half a dozen songs will be coming up, and you'll be ringing me up saying, 'Hey, let's do an album.'" He said, "No, I don't think so. I'm really not interested in music." And he moved about two weeks ago, and I don't even know where he's living now.

PM: Had he expressed anything that had taken the place of music in his life, or anything like that?

AP: No. I just think he wants out of music.

PM: Yeah, it happens.

AP: So, we'll see. But he's kind of going through a funny thing at the moment. Like I said, he's moved. I don't know where he's living. I don't know what his phone number is, which is very strange for your business partner, and somebody you're in a band with. I don't know where he lives right now. I do know that, like I said, he's sick of music, and he doesn't want anything else to do with music.

PM: What about Gregsy? What's happened to [guitarist and keyboardist] Dave Gregory?

AP: Oh, he's still around. I talk to him every few days on the phone, and about once every week or two we go out and eat and drink together, and hatch plans and things. He still does sessions. He still does one-off kind of things like string arrangements for people, or guitar sessions for people, the odd gig here and there. He just came back from Ireland. I think he was working on the Irish band Pugwash, who are really, really great. He worked on a Christmas record for them.

PM: Wow.

AP: If you don't know Pugwash, you should check out an album called *Earworm*. It's like a best of Pugwash. And I'll tell you, at their best, they're almost Beatle-like in their greatness. They are so good.

PM: We're going to get right on that. [Didn't find them on iTunes or eBay, but sent a request for the latest CD. More about Pugwash at pugwashtheband.com, and more about Dave Gregory at guitargonauts.com.]

Some of the strings on those *Warbles* demos and those pizzicato sounds, et cetera, are awfully good. What are those orchestral samples you're using?

AP: Well, they're just the Emulator, by Emu. They're pretty good string samples. I mean, I work in an area that's twelve-by-eight, so I can't really get much in the way of players in there. It has to be stuff that I can work with. But I've just updated my studio. While I couldn't play because of my hand, I've been having all the gear in my studio updated and a lot of soundproofing and sound correction stuff done in there. That's about 95%

finished now, and I should get in there. I really quite fancy looking into some very, very good orchestral samples. I know you can get these things now, if you pay a few thousand, and they're almost undetectable from the real thing.

PM: Yeah, some serious sound libraries going on now.

AP: Yeah, absolutely.

PM: So are you still a Cubase guy? [It's a popular alternative to the ProTools recording software, Cubase is by Steinberg.]

AP: Yeah. I mixed *Monstrance* on Logic [Apple recording software], which I'd never used before, and I took to it pretty quickly. And I've just updated from Cubase VST in my shed to Cubase FX. And when I see that Mr. Steinberg, I'm going to give him a piece of my mind, because those bastards have changed everything. I'll tell what it's like: Imagine being a taxi driver, and you spend a year learning where every street in the city is, right? Then they go and build a new suburb on one side of the city. And instead of just the new suburb being a new street layout, in their "wisdom" they change every street in the city as well!

PM: [laughs]

AP: And it's like, "Come on, you didn't have to do that! Just because you're updating it, why don't you just add in the button that does that, keep the graphics the same, keep the way it works the same, just add in that button, add in that little bar there. Don't change everything!"

PM: [laughs] Yeah, it makes you wonder.

AP: So I mean, if I meet Mr. Steinberg, I shall have to shake him warmly by the testes, I think.

PM: And you know who bought them?

AP: Who bought them?

PM: Yamaha bought Steinberg.

AP: Really?

PM: Yeah, maybe that's what part of the trouble is about.

AP: Oh, the axis of evil--

[laughter]

PM: Yeah, the former axis of evil.

[laughter]

PM: Wow. So I shouldn't keep you so much longer. You've been very generous with your time.

AP: Oh, don't worry about it. I was supposed to do another interview tonight, and the other fellow from Chicago had some family drama come up, and they called this afternoon and said he couldn't do it. So I've got a little while longer.

PM: Oh, good. I'm interested to know, all the mishaps considered, are you writing much these days yourself?

AP: Yeah. What I've been doing is storing on--well, cassettes, to be honest--storing just hundreds of ideas, little sketches for songs. And I've really not been finishing any of them off. So what I should do is dig all these out and run through them all, because it looks like I'm kind of forced into going solo right now.

PM: Yeah.

AP: So I'm going to have to check out all these things and finish off the best pieces. But yeah, I'm still writing. But I'll tell you what, after I got to do this *Monstrance* improvisation, I've been slightly spoiled, because I loved the freedom of improvising. So I may try to put more of that into my music. I mean, I do that kind of thing occasionally. I don't know if you know this, there's a track on *Fuzzy Warbles #7* called "2 Rainbeau Melt."

PM: Right. I do know that.

AP: Yeah. Now, that started off as a poem. And when I finished it, I was happy with it. And I thought, wow, why leave it as a poem? That could be a great song lyric. Why don't I approach it like the "Prince of Orange" process, where you grab the first thing, it doesn't have to make sense, it doesn't have to be the correct structure, it doesn't even have to be the right sort of architectural balance or anything. You just grab something and you make it work. And I did that with "2 Rainbeau Melt." I just grabbed the first little guitar figure, and okay, that's it, and the first sounds that came up. I have a little virtual mellotron there, and I think I had a sample of something like a linnet singing, and I'd just run my hand over that, and well, okay, that's going in as well. And it was a case of nailing in the first things that I found, and making them work.

PM: Wow.

AP: Grabbing little motifs, and whenever, the first motif you grab is going to be the one that's going to go in there. And it seemed to work out okay. So, in a way, you're sort of improvising with yourself, if you know what I mean.

PM: To a guy who has been doggedly pursuing writing for the mainstream country market, that sounds fascinating.

AP: Well, yeah, it's turning off the controller, and you just accept the first thing that comes up, it doesn't matter if it's wrong or right. Because it's the first thing, you give it permission to be right.

PM: I've got to follow your lead there. I got to check some of that out.

AP: But I've done other songs like that in the past. "My Brain Guitar" was done like that. "Prince of Orange" was done like that, on *Fuzzy Warbles*. "Blue Beret" is an obscure XTC song that we never got into the studio, that was done in the same way. You sing, you improvise a line, and then the next line that comes out of your mouth doesn't have to make sense. It may comment on the previous one, it doesn't have to make any sense. So what you end up with is like an impressionist painting. You don't end up with a photograph of an event, you end up with an impressionistic kind of thing. And it's the same with the music, you just grab the first things. Okay, I'm going to start off in G here, I'm going to do four bars of G, and then for no reason at all, I'm going to do two bars of B. And then I'll grab something totally unrelated, then I'll do four bars of B-flat. You just grab the first thing, and you make it work. It's kind of like short-circuiting your editor.

PM: Yeah, just sending him out for a hot dog.

AP: Yeah, yeah. "Say, look, go and get me a hot dog." And while he's gone out, you go, "Hee hee hee, now we can play."

[laughter]

AP: It's like you have to be a kid to create. You have to do that wrong thinking thing. You have to jump off the tracks to create. But the editor is good, because the editor can then come in and say, "Well, that's too damn long, and you know that piece is crap, and you can write a better line than that," or, "This whole idea sucks. Let's try another one." Editors are more important, but the trouble is that the more powerful they get over the years, they can sometimes stop the kid from creating.

PM: Yeah, I mean, you have to have the sense and develop the inner sense to bring them in at the end, not at the beginning.

AP: Exactly. But sometimes Perry White gets so big--

PM: [laughs]

AP: --that he wants to come in right at the start, and poor old Clark Kent doesn't even get the first word of his story typed up.

PM: He wants to ruin Jimmy Olsen's fun.

[laughter]

AP: Yeah, exactly. He wants to take Jimmy Olsen by his little ginger head and beat it against the wall there. So anything you can do to fool the editor, I think helps creativity.

PM: How is the family, Andy, if I may ask, and how old are the kids now?

AP: My daughter is twenty-one. And she's in a band called The SheBeats.

PM: Wow.

AP: Which, if you tap myspace, "The Shebeats," you'll hear some of their demo home recordings.

PM: Fantastic.

AP: And I'll tell you, about the first 300 songs I ever wrote in my life were dog shit. But she started writing songs, and the first three or four are just great.

PM: Wow.

AP: I don't know how she's done it. I didn't give her any help. I didn't give her any tips or anything. She just went ahead and did it. I didn't even know she played guitar that well. So she's got a band called The Shebeats. And they're just kind of starting out, like just done about a half dozen gigs by now.

And my son, who's nineteen, Harry, he's studying animation at university. He's like a junior Walt Disney. And whenever I talk to him, he's working on doing like a musical--he's also pretty musical, he plays guitar and keyboards. And he's kind of writing these musicals--as in the musical type genre thing--and animating them. So we'll be hearing from him, as well, in a few years.

PM: Wow! What an interesting pair of kids.

AP: Yeah.

PM: Well, I hope that Ape House Records becomes a platform for all kinds of Andy-inspired things in the future, because I know there's so much great music inside your soul. And there are many of us out here who want to keep up with it, and want to keep listening to whatever it is you're doing.

AP: Oh, jeez, Frank, that's encouraging.

PM: It's wonderful to talk with you, Andy. You're just a really great fellow. And your music has really meant a lot to me. I appreciate it a lot.

AP: Oh, thank you so much. I appreciate your time, it's been fun.

