

BLODWYN PIG

Title: Live At The Lafayette

Label: Sanctuary Records

Release Date: 2003

Medium: CD

Availability: Very Good

Venue: The Lafayette, Wolverhampton, UK

Recording Date: 1993

Lineup: Mick Abrahams - Vocals, guitar
Andy Pyle - Bass

Jack Lancaster - Sax, flute
Clive Bunker - Drums

Set List: Dunstabel Truck-Driver Man's Blues
See My Way
Oh No!
Baby Girl
Cosmogrification

Cat Squirrel
It's Only Love
Dharma For Six
Six Days On The Road
Boogie Train/Slow Down

Blodwyn Pig is one of the more obscure British progressive rock bands to come out of the late sixties. They were a lighter version of Jethro Tull, not dissimilar to Colosseum and late sixties lineups of John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. Their first two albums both cracked the British top ten but the departure of Mick Abrahams after the second effectively ended the group. Abrahams first resurrected the band a few years later and has toured with versions of the band in the eighties, nineties, and the new millennium. They are presently active.

Mick Abrahams was born in Bedfordshire, England on April 7, 1943. He became a guitar prodigy in the mid sixties, playing with groups like the Hustlers, The Toggery Five, and Neil Christian's Crusaders, replacing Jimmy Page in 1964. In 1967, he formed his own group, McGregor's Engine, with Andy Pyle, Pete Fensome, and Clive Bunker. The band was based in Luton, right outside of London. McGregor's Engine opened for the John Evan Band, which included Ian Anderson and Glen Cornick. When the John Evan band fell apart, Anderson and Cornick remembered their opening act and contacted Abrahams and Bunker to form a new band.

After a series of name changes, the new quartet settled on Jethro Tull and recorded their first album, *This Was* (#62-1968). The album peaked at number ten on the British charts. It was more blues and jazz based than later Tull albums, mostly because of Abrahams, who had a hand in writing some of the songs. Shortly after its release, Abrahams left the band, citing musical differences with Anderson, who wanted to move in a more progressive rock/classical direction. More likely, the split was the result of a power struggle between the two strong willed individuals.

Abrahams, who was now regarded as one of England's leading guitarists, along with Clapton, Beck, Page, Rory Gallagher, and Peter Green, immediately formed a new band. He looked up Pyle and the two convinced Jack Lancaster and Ron Berg to fill out the lineup. A friend of Abrahams who had just returned from a Buddhist retreat suggested the name, Blodwyn Pig.

The group was immediately signed to Island Records, who teamed them with producer Andy Johns, brother of famous producer Glyn Johns. Their debut album, *Ahead Rings Out* (#149-1969), was released in

August, 1969. It peaked at number nine in England and the band immediately became a popular live act. The group's sound was a strong combination of blues, jazz, and rock. Lancaster had an extensive jazz background and his playing was heavily influenced by American Roland Kirk. Like his idol, he often played two saxophones at once while on stage. Pyle and Berg were a lethal rhythm section.

Blodwyn Pig quickly followed with *Getting To This* (#96-1970). It was released in April and was a little more experimental than their debut. It also cracked the British top ten, peaking at number eight. During this period, the band toured the United States twice and played at the Isle Of Wight and Reading festivals.

With everything looking good, Abrahams mercurial nature once again took hold and he abruptly left the group in 1970, stating that he wanted to move in a new musical direction. Lancaster became the de facto leader. Abrahams was initially replaced by two guitarists, Barry Reynolds and Peter Banks. Banks quickly left and was replaced by Larry Wallis. At this point, the band was renamed Lancaster's Bombers, then Lancaster. They never recorded and apart from a few concerts, folded quickly.

After leaving Blodwyn Pig, Abrahams formed a new group, Wommett, which quickly folded. He then recruited Walt Monaghan, Bob Sargent, and Ritchie Dharma to form the Mick Abrahams Band. Their debut album, *Mick Abrahams* (1971), did not sell well. Abrahams added Lancaster to the lineup for their second release, *At Last* (1972). It also did not chart.

In 1974, Abrahams and Lancaster decided to reform Blodwyn Pig. Pyle agreed to rejoin, but Berg was replaced with Clive Bunker, who had left Jethro Tull. The band was only together for six months, but was taped live when they did a *Radio One* live broadcast for the BBC. It was later released as *Live At The Marquee* in 2002 on Abrahams' independent label, Squirrel Music.

After recording an instructional album called *Learning To Play Guitar With Mick Abrahams* (1975), Abrahams left the music business for thirteen years. He held a series of jobs and occasionally played live until 1988, when he formed a new band. Members included Andy Pyle, Deick Heckstall-Smith, Bernie Hetherington, Bruce Boardman, and Clive Bunker. They released a new album, *All Said And Done* (1988).

A smaller lineup consisting of Abrahams, Pyle, Bunker, and Gordon Murphy toured in 1989 and 1990. After Pyle left, Abrahams played live dates with Bunker, Murphy, Jim Leverton, and Dave Lennox. Bunker and Murphy soon left and Graham Walker joined the group on drums. In 1992, Leverton left and was replaced by Mike Summerland. The Abrahams, Lennox, Walker, Summerland lineup recorded a new album, *Lies* (1993). They also toured extensively. One of the tour stops was captured on *All Tore Down* (1995).

This lineup stayed intact until 1996, when Abrahams recorded a new album, *Mick's Back* (1996), with a bunch of studio players. He followed with *One* (1996), which he recorded on acoustic guitar and was accompanied on four tracks by Ian Anderson. In 1997, he released one of the last shows the Mick Abrahams Band did in 1974 before his retirement under the title *Live In Madrid*.

In 1998, Abrahams pulled together a new band consisting of Mike Summerland, Paul Burgess, and Steve Dundon to play the Jethro Tull debut album, *This Was*, in full in concert. One of the dates was recorded and released as *This Is* (1999).

Abrahams released a new solo album, *See My Way* (2000), with a series of guest musicians including Elliott Randall, Dave Bronze, Geoff Whitehorn, and Jim Rodford. Five years later, he followed with

Leaving Home Blues (2005). In support, he hit the road with Graham Walker, John Gordon, and Nick Payne. In 2007, he toured Europe with Clive Bunker and Andrea Garavelli. He continued to play live dates with various backup musicians in 2008 and 2009. Abrahams autobiography, **What Is A Wommett? The Autobiography of Mick Abrahams**, was released in early 2009.

In 2009, the guitarist was struck down by two heart attacks and a stroke in November, 2009, a few months after celebrating his 65th birthday. The stroke left him unable to play guitar. The guitarist suffered another blow in 2010 when he was diagnosed with Menier's disease, which has left him partially deaf. After a long recovery, Abrahams began playing guitar again in 2012 and appeared on stage in August. As of March, 2013, he is still comfortably retired.

As far as I can tell, the only true anthology of Blodwyn Pig is Secret Record's 2011 set, *All Said And Done*, which includes 28 tracks. The first 12 tracks are a 2001 re-recording of Jethro Tull's debut album *This Was*. The remaining 16 tracks are 2001 re-recordings of various Blodwyn Pig material. Aside from that, most of the available compilations are old and new live recordings.

Indigo's 1997 release, *The Modern Alchemist*, contains 11 tracks recorded live in 1969 and 1970. Hux's 2000 set, *Basement Tapes*, includes 13 BBC recordings made between 1969 and 1974, with two bonus tracks from 1996. King Midas' 2012 release, *Radio Sessions 1969-1971*, includes 13 tracks. Sanctuary's 2003 set, *Live At Lafayette*, contains 10 tracks from a 1993 reunion show. Indigo's 1994 release, *All Tore Down*, includes 9 tracks from the Abrahams, Lennox, Summerland, Walker 1993 lineup. Squirrel's 2001 set, *The Full Porky – Live In London*, contains 12 tracks from the Abrahams, Leverton, Lennox, Murphy, Walker lineup.

My only live recording of Blodwyn Pig is the 2003 set, *Live At Lafayette*. The ten track set was recorded during an one shot reunion of three of the original membes and Clive Bunker at a club in Wolverhampton, England in 1993. It was initially released on Indigo Records in 1998. Unfortunately, recording quality is only so so, with undermixed vocals and a bass heavy sound.

While this is a reunion of three of the original members of the band, the setlist only contains two songs from their first two albums. "See My Way" is dominated by the sax work of Lancaster, along with Abrahams guitar work. The vocals are slightly undermixed but the overall performance is solid, with tight interplay between the four musicians.

"It's Only Love" is a fast paced blues piece, with some piercing guitar from Abrahams and some gritty lead vocals. Lancaster plays two saxophones at once during part of the song, then pulls off a bluesy sax solo that is followed by a great solo by Abrahams solo.

The band also harkens back to Jethro Tull for two pieces. "Cat Squirrel" was originally written by Charles Isaiah Ross, commonly known as Doctor Ross, the harmonica boss. It was covered as an instrumental by Cream and Jethro Tull. This version is a full ten minutes long, featuring Abrahams almost exclusively. If you ever had any doubt how good Mick was as a guitarist, you need to listen to this tour de force and the opening track, "Dunstabel Truck-Driver Man's Blues", a delta blues piece which is performed solo on acoustic guitar.

This Was also contained an instrumental that was primarily a drum vehicle for Clive Bunker called "Dharma For One". "Dharma For Six" is the same song, updated for this show. The instrumental includes

some limited work by the full band, but is dominated by Bunker, who was a solid drummer. As drum solos go, this one is typical, with plenty of flash but way too long.

Jack Lancaster is featured on two tracks. The Marshall Tucker like “Oh No!” includes lots of sax and flute work, along with some outstanding guitar work by Abrahams. Bunker and Pyle also are featured, handling the song’s many tempo shifts with ease and driving the faster sections with abandon.

“Cosmogrification” is the most progressive jazz based piece in the set. The song allows the entire band to really stretch out. Pyle’s bass work is outstanding while Bunker is on fire on drums. Abrahams provides some scat singing, sometimes in tandem with his guitar playing. Lancaster is prominently featured on sax, sometimes playing two at once. All in all, the song showcases the band’s jazz side. Neither “Oh No!” nor “Cosmogrification” appear on any of the group’s early work.

“Baby Girl” is the most r&b oriented piece on the set. It features nice tight instrumental work and a smooth vocal. This song dates back to their early days, appearing on some BBC sessions. “Six Days On The Road” is fast blues, with plenty of explosive ensemble playing and gritty vocals by Abrahams. It works very well.

The band’s encore is a medley of two classic blues songs. “Boogie Train” is electric delta blues, performed solo by Abrahams. Mid song, the entire band kicks in with a frantic version of “Slow Down”, which was also covered by Alvin Lee’s solo band in concert and dates back to the band’s earliest recording sessions. Abrahams vocals are solid and Lancaster and Abrahams pull off nice sax and guitar solos.

The energy level of this show is good, with the band getting stronger as the concert progresses. However, I’m not sure that this is the best way to experience Blodwyn Pig since it contains so little of their original material. I would opt for the Indigo Record’s set, *Modern Alchemist*, which is almost entirely made up of BBC recorded sessions featuring songs from their first two albums.