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Weekend

Spotlight on



■ Procol Harum – their story started in Southend, where they started as a rhythm and blues group

an iconic band

Procol Harum never got credit they deserved, says book

By HANNAH MARSH



THEY wrote one of the best-selling singles of all time and carved out a pioneering rock-meets-baroque sound, but Procol Harum never received the elevated status they deserved, according to new biographer Henry Scott-Irvine.

His Procol Harum and the Ghosts of a Whiter Shade of Pale, launches at the British Film Institute on Southbank, London, tomorrow. A treasure trove of unseen clips of the Southend band will be screened alongside the launch at the star-studded event.

Henry says: "In 1967, A Whiter Shade of Pale became the biggest-selling British single of the Sixties. I always thought it was a fascinating tale.

"Procol Harum had seven Billboard top 50 albums in America, but they're almost overlooked here. They're only seen for A Whiter Shade of Pale. Some people compare them to being like Genesis or the Moody Blues, but they're nothing like those bands.

"Their roots are in soul music, rhythm and blues and classical themes."

The book features a foreword by film director Martin Scorsese, who talks about his love for the band and their lyrics, singling out A Salty Dog.

Henry says: "Procol Harum were the first rock band to play live with an orchestra anywhere in the world – before Deep Purple, who are always credited with it. As a result they did record an album a couple of years later with an orchestra, which went to number five in America."

Explaining what he finds so compelling about Procol Harum's individual sound he says: "I think Gary's voice is very particular, it's a real soul voice. They're much more than just a prog rock band, they're a band with tunes. Call it old-fashioned, but all their songs are great tunes.

"That Hammond organ and piano with a blues guitar, that was their thing, soulful music, a classic theme and a tune."

Henry did come up against challenges – the band's bitter fallout and ensuing legal battle, which saw Matthew Fisher win co-writing credits



■ Haunting – Procol Harum's A Whiter Shade of Pale sold ten million copies, making it the biggest-selling British single of the Sixties



■ Henry Scott-Irvine – new Procol Harum biography

for A Whiter Shade of Pale in 2009. It is still a sensitive subject and needed to be handled carefully.

He says: "That part of the story is told as it was reported by the press with all the band members' official statements of how they felt about the situation. It's not taking sides.

"We had it legally vetted by two lawyers, that was an important part."

An early incarnation of the band, called the Paramounts, included Gary Brooker, Robin Trower and BJ Wilson, as well as Chris Copping, who later replaced Matthew Fisher in the Seventies. They gained moderate recognition, before Brooker formed Procol Harum, who then shot to stardom with their debut single, A White Shade of Pale.

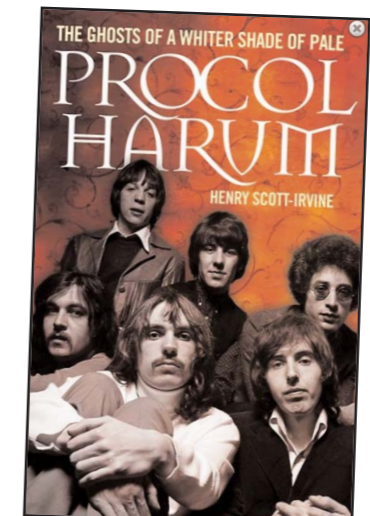
Henry says: "I've always been fascinated by Procol Harum and the music that I guess is known as the Thames Delta music scene. It's funny but if you look at it, more

rhythm and blues came out of Southend-on-Sea than any other place in Britain next to Mersey in the Sixties."

Procol Harum and the Ghosts of a Whiter Shade of Pale launches tomorrow at the British Film Institute, Southbank, London, where there'll be a screening of Paramounts and Procol Harum film and television footage, showing clips ranging from A Whiter Shade of Pale to unseen colour psychedelic footage of Procol Harum debuting Homburg, A Salty Dog and Robin Trower's Procol song Whisky Train, along with book signings and a few surprises.

The event kicks off at 6.30pm. To book tickets, visit www.bfi.co.uk

The book is released by Omnibus Press.



■ London launch – the book

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On August 28, 1970, Procol Harum performed to their biggest-ever audience, over half a million people, at the five-day Isle of Wight Pop Festival on the same day as Tony Joe White, Taste (featuring Rory Gallagher), Family, Chicago, and a host of other big name acts. Procol's guitarist Robin Trower finally got to stand on the same stage as his hero Jimi Hendrix, who also starred at this epic festival, albeit on a different day.

Record Mirror's Lon Goddard ran a piece dated September 19 featuring the headline: "Procol Smoked Out On Isle", describing how, "In the bitter chill of the night, with miserable audience conditions and the fatigue of many listeners, Procol could do no wrong."

Gary Brooker remembers: "I thought our Isle of Wight performance would have been nice for a sunny afternoon, but we sat around for a very long time getting cold before the performance. The other thing that really bothered me was the great billows of smoke that kept blowing over from the camp fires directly on to the stage. "Because of the conditions the fast numbers went over much better. The act was more or less planned up until the rock 'n' roll

BOOK EXTRACTS: DAY ROBIN TROWER MET JIMI HENDRIX

numbers at the end. Those we do if the time is right!" Procol's performance of 'A Salty Dog' was included on the 1971 CBS triple album the First Great Rock Festivals of the Seventies, compiling various artists' performances from both the Atlanta and Isle Of Wight festivals.

Procol's next major festival appearance was scheduled for September 5 at the massive Love & Peace event held on the Isle of Fehmarn, which would have seen Procol Harum share equal billing with Sly & the Family Stone, Canned Heat, Peter Green, Ginger Baker's Airforce and Ten Years After. However, advance warning of heavy-handed policing at the hands of German biker gangs motivated Doug D'Arcy to withdraw both Procol Harum and Ten Years After from the event, and neither band left their hotel until the gig was over. It was just as well as there was a near riot and the promoter's offices were burned to the

ground; so much for the promise of 'Love & Peace'. The headliner at the event was Jimi Hendrix, who played through heavy rain to the miserable, unsettled crowd. Ironically the day before the Isle of Fehmarn debacle Procol also played with Hendrix at the Berlin Super Concert at the Deutschlandhalle.

Robin Trower: "I remember we played on the bill directly after him in Berlin. Jimi's set was really great. We had heard it whilst standing in the wings. But people were booing and throwing bottles and cans at him. We came on and I threw the bottles and beer cans back at the audience. "How could they do that to Jimi? Anyway, that day, after all those gigs throughout all those years, I finally got to stand on stage on the very same spot that Jimi had played live. "A few days later he was dead. Really sad!"

Extracts from the Ghosts of a Whiter Shade of Pale, by Henry Scott-Irvine

Southend band through and through

BEFORE their ten million selling hit single A Whiter Shade of Pale in 1967, Procol Harum started out as Southend rhythm and blues group, the Paramounts. They had a top 50

hit with Poison Ivy in 1963. After the group split up, singer Gary Brooker, who lived in the town, wanted more from his music.

He formed Procol Harum

with lyricist Keith Reid, before later being rejoined by Paramounts friends Robin Trower, Barrie Wilson and Chris Copping, making them a Southend band once again.

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