INTERVIEW

RUPERT LOYDELL

Falmouth University

**Fun, Fashion, Faith and Flamboyance:
an interview with Bev Sage**

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Bev Sage is a London-based artist who works with print, performance and sound. With a background in music, film and photography she uses a multi-disciplinary approach to echo the spontaneity and raw energy of action painting. She was a key member of Fish Co., Writz, Famous Names, the Techno Twins, Casualtease and the Techno Orchestra, and also performed and recorded with Modern Romance as ‘the queen of the rapping scene’.

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In ‘Weird religious backgrounds: Larry Norman, Jesus Rock and an interview with Gregory Alan Thornbury’ (Loydell, 2019) I drew attention to the difference between Jesus Music and the resulting Christian Rock industry in the USA and UK, with the latter proving too small to sustain a business model. I also alluded to the debate that was happening within Christian circles about whether musicians who outwardly identified through their Christian beliefs were playing to evangelize and witness, to entertain, or were simply musicians who happened to hold religious beliefs.

Bev Sage was a member of Fish Co. during the time they changed their name to Writz and declared that 'we want to be a very successful unit. We want to produce good music, good commercial music.' (Fairnie, 1979, 26). This resulted in some run ins with the Christian press and public, with even the sympathetic writers Simon Jenkins and Steve Goddard asking front man Steve Fairnie if the hours and hours he spent defending playing ‘good music’ was the reason 'you're leaving the Christian world?'. Fairnie riposted: 'I'm not leaving the Christian world – I've never been involved in it more in my life. [...] I've changed jobs. I've gone for an interview on the 1st of April 1978, and fortunately have had the offer of becoming a rock band' (Fairnie, 1979, 37). And that band were adamant that they wanted to be professional musicians and entertainers.

At the same time another Christian band, After The Fire, had signed to CBS; both bands regularly gigged at London clubs such as the Greyhound, Marquee and Music Machine, as well as the university and club circuit nationally and abroad. After The Fire would regularly be heckled and discouraged by the DJs at the Marquee, who would line up an evening of tracks like Black Widow's ‘Come to the Sabbat’ (1970) before they arrived on stage, but the band also received support in the weekly music press from critic John Gill, who was prepared to overlook their ambivalent lyrics (were these love songs or hymns?) and enjoy the music.

Writz and Famous Names also had champions such as journalist Robbi Millar, especially for their energetic live performances, but the songs by Writz onwards were not ‘Christian’ in any obvious way, the band preferring instead to write songs that deconstructed the machinations of fame and the media or explored crowd-control and the powers of persuasion, all delivered in a dynamic live performance using masks and props to accompany the raw energy on show. Front man Steve Fairnie, was the principal focus of live performance. He would cajole, tease and heckle the audience into life, sometimes through a megaphone, inventing (non-existent) live radio broadcasts, inviting punk hecklers on stage, studying the other members of the band in close-up through binoculars, or flirting with his front line (and real life) partner Bev. As much as the band aspired to be ‘super heroes’ on stage and in a song of the same name, they also realised how fickle fame could be:

 I got this sneaking' suspicion I ain't a super hero at all

 I got a strange sensation everybody's waiting for me to fall

 Hey? what you doin' with that camera, I haven't got my super suit on

 (Oh no) what's it say in that headline 'I'm sorry son your career's gone'

(Writz 1973)

Popular success eluded both bands, despite singles in the lower reaches of the charts, radio airplay and major tours (After The Fire supported both ELO and Van Halen, and appeared on the BBC’s *Old Grey Whistle Test* (1979; cf Technorefugee, 2012) and Radio 1's *In Concert* [1979, 1980, 1981; After The Fire, 2009]). In both Writz’s and Famous Names’ case it was actually record companies going bust that twice brought an end to their career trajectory. Despite continuing as the Technos (and variations thereof) with a more minimal and financially sustainable electronic approach, Sage and Fairnie would ultimately reposition themselves as artists, designers, producers and image consultants rather than musicians, in response to ongoing poverty and lack of success, as well as the demands of raising a family.

A few years later mainstream bands such as U2 could and would sing openly about their Christian faith (and doubt) whilst being firmly immersed in rock culture and showbiz. Bev Sage suggests that the Writz and Famous Names were simply ahead of their time, a view I concur with. Interestingly, because Writz’s lighting man Willie Williams has long been the production designer for U2, Bev Sage and her children are good friends of the band these days, and Steve Fairnie sayings have been known to pop up on U2’s giant screens amongst the babble of quotes, information and image that is often part of their show. (Cf, unknown author, 2019). Jake Fairnie, who helped with this interview, also contributed a brain scan from his psychology research at University College London to Williams to use as part of U2’s *Innocence & Experience* tour (ibid.; see also, Cubistular, 2011).

In this interview, Bev Sage discusses these various bands she has been part of and the complexities of being both Christians and musicians in a changing (sub)culture. She travels from a teenage all-girl band on the Christian circuit to joining Writz and Famous Names, and then forming the Technos. She also touches upon the untimely early death of her partner Steve Fairnie (Loydell 1993a, 1993b; Wroe 1993). The interview concludes, however, with a new musical and life relationship with Errol Kennedy from the band Imagination, as well as the 2019 release of a *Techno Twins Greatest Hits 1978-1984* album.

**Rupert Loydell (RL)**: *I caught up with Fish Co. in the mid-70s, with a gig at The Swan in Hammersmith Broadway. You were already a rock band by then, but Fish Co. started as an acoustic duo. Somewhere along the way, you entered the picture – you have credits on both Fish Co. albums (1975, 1978) as a photographer and designer, and of course were also front-woman by the mid 70s and on* Beneath the Laughter *(1978). Can you tell us a little bit of the early days of Fish Co.?*

**Bev Sage (BS)**: Fish Co. stared as a duo with Steve Rowles and Steve Fairnie. They started songwriting when they were just teenagers, and wrote some great songs like 'Jimmy Bootlace Seller' and '60s Children' (Fish Co. 1975) which were really stories about people. Together they had great witty ideas about how music and lyrics could go together, influenced by people like Andy Fairweather Low and the Beatles. It was the stories they were interested in.

How did we meet? Well, I was in a band called Soul Truth, with my cousin Judy and two other friends, Joy and Linda, and we were on the same kind of circuit as Fish Co. We met Nigel Goodwin, who was one of the main movers in the Christian arts scene, in 1970. Fairnie and Rowles from Fish Co. were there dressed up like spies, being ridiculous as always. The two bands did lots of gigs together around the South West, especially Bristol and Torquay, and Fairnie was always great friends with all of us.

Judy of course ended up marrying Andy Piercy who went on to be in After The Fire, so Ishmael and Andy (1973) must have been around too. We were all this similar music circuit. Fairnie was at the Royal College of Art and Rowles was at Trent Park doing drama. I remember them coming to play in Torquay. Fairnie stayed at my place and he said 'We really need a photographer to do the cover for the album we've just recorded. Would you do it?' I remember changing clothes about five times between being offered the job and saying 'Yes'! I seem to recall my spectacular outfit was red wellington boots with a black corduroy dress with a red polystyrene hat! That's what I decided to say 'Yes' with.

And then we made a plan and illustrated each song. I was doing photography at Ravensbourne, in the Bromley area, and it was a great excuse to meet up again with Fairnie. And from then on we were just the best of friends and the rest is history...

**RL**: *And what about the second album?*

**BS**: Ok, so in 1978, by the time *Beneath the Laughter* came out, I was a backing singer. I wasn't singing so often with the girls, and Fairnie was keen for me to join in. So I did backing vocals with Barbie Benson, touring Holland and doing all sorts of things. The last days of Fish Co. were also the last days of playing any church venues or youth clubs, we were just starting to branch out into something a little bit different. We decided, even though Fairnie had just graduated from the RCA, to go into music full time rather than art. We'd been offered jobs in both areas but the rock and roll life style beckoned! I think I taught for a year to save some money, and then we went on the road from ‘77.

**RL**: *Whatever we make of it all in hindsight, punk happened, and after the initial outrage, resistance and media frenzy, post-punk happened. Before* Beneath the Laughter *(Fish Co., 1978)* *even came out the band had become Writz in response to the changing musical scene. You'd already documented some of punk's reasons and attitudes, if somewhat cynically, on 'Seventies Children' (Fish Co., 1978), and Fish Co.'s live act had become much louder and energetic along the way – 'Super Heroes', the track which closes* Beneath the Laughter *(Fish Co., 1978) was especially high-energy on stage. Tell me about the name change and what precipitated that?*

**BS**: It was a really exciting time back then. Fairnie and I lived off the Fulham Road, very near to where punk was happening in the Kings Road. We felt on the frontline back then. We knew Poly Styrene and the Damned then; and when we moved to Portobello Road we caught the zeitgeist there, too. It felt very difficult pushing the energy of our music forward with all this happening around us. Live, we moved from people sitting listening to us singing, to a few spikeytops coming down the front and getting a bit aggressive with us. Suddenly, everything needed to be more energetic, like the audience, because we couldn't match them! It wasn't cynical, we couldn't resist it: that energy attracted us. We were punk in the sense that we were into live, into raw, into expressing ourselves, but we didn't have the dark, heavy cynical side.

I mean, we used to see the Clash, who were really quite well off public school types, change into their ripped jeans and dress down for gigs, whereas we did the opposite. We enjoyed playing with the idea of stardom and image, exploring concepts of celebrity and what you did in front of audiences. We were fascinated by old movie stars like Dietrich and Monroe, the way they became glamorous, so we didn't fit the aggressive, annoyed-with-life idea of punk. We were between two worlds really.

When New Romantics came along we felt quite at home. We'd had a dressing-up and props box for a long time and found that far more interesting!

**RL**: *And the name change?*

BS: We loved the name Fish Co. and the band was very much part of the Christian scene, but we'd come out of that. We'd all grown up in the church but suddenly we wanted to be playing down at the Dingwalls, the Marquee and the Music Machine. We made a conscious decision not to take our Christian audience with us but to start again through our music. People would find us if they wanted to, that would be great, but – and this sounds weird in retrospect – in those days the Christian music scene was more tribal and many people simply wouldn't go to those clubs.

The name Writz was to do with flamboyance and fashion, and also a pun on the idea of the music biz being full of writs. We were always playing with the ideas of hype and celebrity, and it seemed to do with that too. It was 1979, we wanted to get out there and do it, make it happen!

**RL**: *You also managed to upset a lot of Christian fans and the Christian media at the time when Fairnie declared inan interview that* *'for our group, I just see it like... we want to produce good art-form like for instance a rabbit-breeder – all he's got to do is produce a good rabbit. Or a pigeon-fancier has got to fancy a good pigeon.' (Fairnie, 1979), going on to add that ' Writz [...] want to be a very successful unit. We want to produce good music, good commercial music.' Why was that such an outrageous thing to say in in the late 1970s?*

**BS**: Back in the day there was a choice between being a Christian or being secular. If people were in one world they didn't like you being in the other. If you were seen to be a Christian band playing to Christian audiences that was ok, but we saw ourselves as Christians taking it out there; and couldn't see any separation between the worlds we moved in. I mean Christ of all people was out there in every situation, bringing good stuff. We didn't want to be trapped in a Christian subculture. Fairnie was always thinking a bit off-the-wall, and in fact he did have a friend who was a pigeon-fancier, another who bred rabbits and others whose friendship we treasured.

Fairnie couldn't bear the idea of art with some sort of Bible text attached; nothing needed to be that explanatory. He wanted his beliefs and a celebration of life to come through any art or music he made, and that to be made well. It was a new conversation at the time, one not a lot of people were having. Our attitude caused outrage because people wanted us to be more conventional.

RL: *You weren't the only Christian band in the secular music world by then, though, were you? There was a friendly rivalry with After The Fire (I remember you flashing the gatefold album sleeve of* Beneath the Laughter *[Fish Co., 1978] at them after a Bristol gig, and pointing out that their indie LP* Signs of Change *(1978) only had a single sleeve), and of course there had been UK visits by American Jesus Music acts such as Larry Norman and Liberation Suite. The Greenbelt Festival was happening annually, and homegrown bands such as Parchment (1972b, 1973, 1975, 1977) and Malcolm & Alwyn (1972, 1973) had achieved some success (and are nowadays collected by psych-folk fans!).*

**BS**: John Pac, who was part of Parchment, probably had the biggest chart success with the 'Light Up the Fire' single (1972a). He was a wonderful human being, who produced both Fish Co. albums. He and people like his bandmate Sue McClellan were older than us and showed us that good songs could cut through most things. There was also a great songwriter called Paul Field around, who I knew quite well, although he saw his role more in the Christian world. I think he could have been a James Taylor, and he's written some amazing songs. But if you get caught in the Christian world it can limit potential, although there is a big market now, a different world to the one we inhabited!

After The Fire were the band who took the Christian audience into more of a secular scene. They didn't see that as an issue, whereas we felt we wanted to be true to where we were, and move out of the Christian scene. But that was just us.

**RL**: *What about U2? It wouldn't be long before they were famous?*

**BS**: U2 were five years after us. The whole band came to see us at the Marquee and we were probably at our most art-school, which meant we weren't going to impress an Irish rock band with a passion for saying deep, meaningful things. When we had a conversation later they did like something we had done, which was 'Foreign Land' (the Technos, 1983). It turned out we'd been the first band they saw when they came to London, and they thought we were dreadful... but they liked us, especially our lighting designer Willie Williams, who later joined them, moving from us to much greater things!

**RL**: *I know you can't speak for them, but After The Fire went through a similar change themselves, from progrock keyboard and guitar band to a new-wave trio (and then quartet), taking a month-long break to write new material, partly precipitated by bass player Nick Battle leaving to join your band. To these ears he fitted right in with your amazing guitar player Jules Hardwick and drummer Arry Axell. Yours seemed a more gradual musical transformation than this specific reinvention?*

**BS**: We reinvented ourselves more than once. Sometimes it was more gradual, but you've got to remember it was a real shock when punk hit and music changed dramatically. We were never part of progrock, but that hit a screeching halt, and for After The Fire it must have been a real moment when they had to change. We just realised we had to speed things up and make things happen, because Fairnie and I knew what was happening in the clubs and record shops. We were a hardworking band, always busy gigging and recording.

**RL**: *You were based in London by then and playing the London circuit hard (at places like the Marquee, Music Machine, the Greyhound in Fulham and Dingwalls), with successful live reviews and I would say, a good live following, including – I seem to remember – Spider and the Portobello punks. Although you'd always been lively on stage, there was now a props box to hand, full of masks, the front of a broken TV, some costumes, a rubber chicken and a rubber guitar. Entertainment was the order of the day, and you managed to do so on a low budget and with some panache, not to mention a whizz of a lighting designer. Tell me about making a spectacle of yourself!*

**BS**: Fairnie always had what he called 'a funny box' with quirky objects in a suitcase. He had masks and a gun that would shoot a flag out with BANG! on, and even before Willie joined us he had three lighting pedals so he could do his own lights with his feet on stage. One of the legendary things he created was a backwards man: he would put on a complete costume backwards and move around stage. It looked totally insane under strobe lighting. He had a red guitar, too, with what looked like a Fender body, with a massive foam neck and could join in when Jules was screeching out a guitar solo. Jules would turn his back and Fairnie would be under a strobe light again twisting his foam guitar every way. We wanted to be witty and entertaining. And we were.

Weall know a lot of bands have come out of art school, but it was a big driver for us, as much as the music, because we'd both had art training. For Fairnie and I it was always about the live event, we always thought about spectacle and entertainment and wanted to push boundaries. Fairnie was influenced by great entertainers like Billy Graham and Charlie Chaplin, as well as vaudeville music people; he understood how to entertain a crowd.

**RL**: *Your sense of fun and fashion, living within your means (? well, sort of), home-made lighting rig and your own PA system (made by After The Fire's Peter Banks' Epicentrum company) seems in sharp contrast to the norms of the day where major labels made advances, followed by demands for hit singles and albums, demands for new band image, demands for repayment, more tours, buying out of contracts, etc. (I'm thinking of After The Fire and CBS/Epic [1979, 1980, 1982]). From where I stood in the audience you seemed to do things on your own terms? Was this you lot being bolshie, or was there something 'punk' or 'indie' about all this?*

**BS**: I think we always had a bigger picture in mind; we always thought were going to be a global success. It was interesting to have to come to terms with that, once you realised the world wasn't actually waiting for us to hit them with our amazing ideas.

We came at an interesting time, pre-video really. If we had been a few years later we would have had all that to use, but as it was we concentrated on our live shows. I guess we were punks in the way we didn't settle for any record company nonsense. It was a tricky one to get an advance, but we gave it attitude. Sometimes our ideas were probably mistaken.

We went through managers and a number of fantastic producers. I mean, Godley & Creme, Anne Dudley, Phil Harding, fantastic producers. We made some great tracks and albums, but we seemed to have this situation where record companies went bust whenever we were about to take off. You can look back and cry, which I sometimes do, or you can simply realise what an amazing time we had. I mean, I still don't understand why it didn't happen. At one point Trevor Horn was keen to give us 'Video Killed the Radio Star', but I guess he's really glad he didn't! We might have done quite well with that.

**RL**: *In retrospect, there were other bands around making art post-punk pop or rock. Did you feel a kinship with bands like the Original Mirrors, or even Supercharge? Some of your antics on stage weren't a million miles away from the way Supercharge would perform – I remember Albie Donnelly used to announce a 'laid back number' and the whole band apart from the drummer would lie down on stage for the duration of the song.*

**BS**: We definitely did the same kind of gigs and worked in parallel with Deaf School, that Original Mirrors came from. Deaf School were just brilliant, we loved bands that thought about their visual image as well as the music. The Tubes, X-Ray Spex, Gaye Advert, the Rezillos... the Damned knew what they were doing too. Think about Adam Ant's move from punk to being the darling of the New Romantics! But, when you are doing a couple of hundred gigs a year you tend to have your heads down a bit – and we didn't have the internet then. You were either at a gig or you weren't.

**RL**: *You were also very good at what we now call hype and self-publicity (or perhaps bullshit!). I remember Fairnie would mention something at the start of a tour and see what it had become at the end of the tour; a kind of Chinese whispers. I remember talking to him pre-gig in Chichester when a fan came up and asked if it was true that Jules Hardwick had played all the guitars on the new Steve Hackett album. You had a thing about the media from the word go, didn't you, with songs like 'Private Lives' and 'TV Times'? (Writz, 1979)*

**BS**: We were just fascinated by the press and celebrity, by how people became celebrity. Bowie was playing with image, and it was before Madonna, but image has always been important to rock stars. It's much easier to reflect on it now than it was at the time, that shift from longhaired progrockers, post-hippies really, to binbags, leather, nappies, safety pins and daft hairstyles.

We were interested in how you became different with lights and staging, how you presented yourself in a different space. We loved newspapers (and this was pre-Murdoch) and actually I think we sometimes got it absolutely spot-on; some of our lyrics were quite prophetic. I mean I'm proud of lines like 'raised by the photo lens / scratched by the press' ('When is Pleasure Pain?', Techno Orchestra, 1982). They still have a relevance now.

**RL***: And that opened out into ideas of how people are perceived. You recorded 'Super Heroes' again (Fish Co., 1978; Writz, 1979), a song about how even superheroes are only human, about how reality can kick in, and closed the* Writz *album (1979) with 'Muscle Culture', a surreal rant using the subject of health and fitness to parody and critique fascism. Was this a response to Rock Against Racism, or just a song about the extremes of media manipulation? The video on Youtube (Writz, 1980), introduced by a very young looking Steve Wright on his pilot TV show is astonishing. I often play it for my students!*

**BS**: I think the second; we went on all the marches. Fairnie was fascinated by mass rallies and the psychology of the crowd. We were interested in how charisma and enigma worked. 'Muscle Culture' is full on parody, I mean that idea of everyone chanting 'we must improve ourselves'. We felt an irony as performers but also as people in a changing society, the contradiction of people shouting and screaming about things but also the joy of no war years.

**RL**: *'Night Nurse' had been the first single of the* Writz *album (1979) hadn't it? I was never quite convinced it was a song about fair pay for nurses... it seemed more a song of lust and desire for women in uniform. Or is that just me?*

**BS**: I think you are on to something there... Willie did make me a pre-Madonna nurse's outfit with a tubular bust and a red cross. Fairnie was in hospital a lot as a kid though, and nurses were an important part of his recovery! So, he did always support the nurses... Godley & Creme produced 'Night Nurse'; they recorded 24 tracks of me laughing for the middle eight. They were geniuses, but of course you don't always know that at the time.

**RL**: *Would it be fair to suggest that the* Writz *album (1979) didn't capture the energy and exuberance of the band live. How did you feel at the time?*

**BS**: At the time, we were hopeful that what we heard was better than it actually was. We had a window in the Electric Records building in Poland Street and the excitement was fantastic, electric even. The truth is we didn't even capture half the energy we had, but you have to promote what you have at the time, and use your creative energy, hoping it was going to be amazing.

**RL**: *In late 1979, Electric Records went bankrupt, as did Writz, but seven months later, in July 1980, Writz were back but now called Famous Names. You very quickly got a record deal with Trident, and then went off on the infamous European Circus tour, accompanied by several circus acts as well as the dance/mime troupe Shock. I believe this was self-financed and you managed to come back about 50p each out of pocket, despite this D.I.Y. approach. Tell me about the tour, and your gradual move into the New Romantic scene that Shock were part of.*

**BS**: Our hearts were broken when Writz didn't happen. I mean we had invested so much time and energy. And the name change was part of a healing process for us. We were already going to New Romantic clubs before we met Shock, and there seemed a mutual benefit by us combining forces. Fairnie had had this concept of a circus tour, insisting on lady wrestlers. We had a sold out month-long tour, mainly universities and a bit in Europe, and put Shock on as a dance troupe, lady wrestlers, a fireater called 'The Wizard of Helldom' and then us headlining. We provided an evening of wild fun, and helped get Shock into rock more than dance. There were 332 of us on tour, probably more as the wizard's dog had fleas.

**RL**: *It all gets a bit hazy and unhappy at the end of 1980. Having performed in Dennis Potter's TV play* Cream in My Coffee *(1980), your manager Dave Rees died in a car crash and Fairnie was taken seriously ill with a duodenal ulcer and spent Christmas in hospital, infamously being allowed a Guinness ice cube for Christmas dinner. Although you did at least one concert with Tik (or Tok) from Shock singing Fairnie's vocals, there was a loss of momentum for the band, although you regrouped in March 1981 at Trident Studios to record the next album,* Venetian Blind (1981)*. That album* *never got released, as Electric went bankrupt and bounced a cheque for a year's work by the band. It must have been heartbreaking to have this happen a second time. Famous Names performed in Israel but disbanded soon after, is that correct?*

**BS**: Yes it was tough times. Fairnie was in hospital a lot, and really poorly. For several months I used to go from full-time recording at the studio to the hospital, relaying tapes and notes and comments. I remember walking around on my own that Christmas, having visited Fairnie, and London was like a ghost town. Tough, but busy and exciting too. We tried to regain momentum and survive, and in the end it didn't happen.

We went to Israel in 1981 or 1982, lived in the Sheridan in Tel Aviv for a month, and were playing gigs war-permitting. We suddenly became rock and roll celebrities! We were actually invited over by T-Slam who were like the Israeli Beatles, to be their support act. It was a great idea of our manager to fly us out, and give us a break and some time together, but things were already difficult and we used some guest musicians because of that. It was during that time that Fairnie and I developed the idea of the Technos and Casualtease and making our music more electric, making it differently to how we had previously.

**RL**: *Back in the early 80s, Bev and Fairnie became the Techno Twins, an electro-pop duo with some chart success. You delved backwards towards the 1930s and '40s and released* Technostalgia *(1982), but also continued working with Steve Rowles, members of Shock, and even Willie Williams, as Casualtease, bringing human sculpture, performance art, a bed, and a lot of bandages, white muslin and fun to the masses (well, a select few). Bev, tell me first about the Techno Twins.*

**BS**: The Techno Twins came about because we'd been offered a Greenbelt Festival[[1]](#endnote-1) gig and we didn't have a band any more. We'd lost Rowles to the birds[[2]](#endnote-2) and lost our advance, we had to make something work and earn some money. I was involved with Greenbelt early on, and although we were very keen to bring art, faith and music together, we later had a somewhat ambivalent relationship to the festival. as we didn't want to be in the Christian subculture of the time.

But we saw that the Greenbelt Festival had no electronic bands performing and created the Techno Twins to fill that gap and as a response to what was happening elsewhere musically. And we did cover songs for the first time, because we had started with the look and the sound rather than the music. We'd been to Berlin and the club scene and the campness of the scene inspired us to use songs like 'Falling in Love Again'. We used Dave Hewson on keyboards, who had been to art school with back in the day, trying to create something that was of the moment*.* We just couldn't afford a band any more, so we cut back.

So there were plenty of reasons for the Technos, but it was mostly we loved the sound and magic of synthesizers, the way you could create new worlds with soundscapes. We really leapt into that.

**RL**: *And can you both tell me about Casualtease? Did this project allow you to release your inner performance artist? Why was the album released under the Techno Orchestra moniker?*

**BS**: Casualtease was a reason for us to perform without being seen. We loved the idea of being undercover and below the radar, especially when we started doing cover versions. We felt we could protect our integrity and also work our ideas out on stage in a different way. So we split our project into two, with Casualtease being a pun on both casualties and striptease, as well as casual cups of tea whilst you were talking. We used a whole mix of different music to perform to, with performers and stage swathed in bandages.

**RL**: *Although the 12" singles* Foreign Land *(1983) and* Spirit of the Thing *(1984), attracted lots of airplay, the Technos were not particularly successful after this time. Rowles, returned to a 'normal' job, I believe, and Bev, you and Fairnie went into production and promotion, fine art and photography, modelling, parenting, magic shows, game design ('Hype, the only board game with all the slime and grime of the music business') (Williams & Fairnie, 1984), chicken hypnotism (unknown author and date, 'Chicken Hypnosis'), illustration (Lax, 1994), and eventually Fairnie became a college lecturer before his untimely death in 1993 (Wroe, 1993; Loydell, 1993a, 1993b). Was stepping away from the music biz hard for you?*

**BS**: There's different answers to that, the first being of course not, we made a fantastic life of our own and we were brilliant at what we did next. Then there's a realistic one that of course it was a changing time of life. We had a young family and our priorities were changing. We did make one album in America for Refuge Records (the Technos, 1988) as a family, but it was tough. We weren't successful enough to be able to have the lifestyle we needed to make space to create, and our kids had become the most important thing to us and we couldn't let them be affected by us having a lifestyle as musicians again. We did have to diversify, and it was tough, but we also knew we'd had an incredible journey and it had been great. I believe we could have been successful and that the songs still stand up today.

**RL**: *And you are reissuing some of them soon?*

**BS**: Yes, it's a long story but I have ended up being married to my old friend Errol from Imagination, who I haven't seen for a long time. Errol was fascinated by what had (or hadn't) happened to our back catalogue and now we've spent some time remixing and remastering and put the project together, with contributions from my children Jake and Famie: *Techno Twins Greatest Hits 1978-1984* (2019). And there is no irony in that title whatsoever!

**RL**: *In 2016, you celebrated Fairnie's fine art with a retrospective exhibition in London (Fairnie, 2016) and an evening feast for many of those who had supported you and been involved back then and since. You also re-affirmed that Fairnie continues to hold the record for chicken-hypnotism in the* Guinness Book of Records*! Looking back, what do you best remember about the music business and your part in post-punk, new wave, new romanticism and pop?*

**BS**: Being alongside a legend. It was great. It was an absolute rollercoaster, from singing to old people in church with my mum on piano, then moving from the church to making noises and squeaks and making visuals in bands. The creativity of the journey and the amazing people I worked with. And now, the absolute joy of being with someone who was there back then and can help me bring it back to life again for me and my kids. I mean, such joy I can only see Fairnie dancing in the heavens and saying 'Get out there girl!'.

**RL**: *Thank you for your time, and the music*.

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**NOTE**

The *Lunatic Republic* website at fairnie.net contains all anyone could possibly want to know about Steve Fairnie's life, art, career and music. Bev Sage's website, bevsage.com, also contains a discography and some music videos, as well as news about her current artistic activities.

**CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS**

Rupert Loydell is Senior Lecturer in the School of Writing and Journalism at Falmouth University, the editor of *Stride* magazine, a contributing editor to *international times*, and a widely published poet. He has written for academic journals such as *Punk & Post-Punk* (which he is on the editorial board of)*, New Writing, Axon, Text, Journal of Writing in Creative Practice, Short Fiction in Theory & Practice, Revenant, The Journal of Visual Art Practice*, and contributed a co-written chapter to *Brian Eno. Oblique Music* (Bloomsbury, 2016) and to *Critical Essays on Twin Peaks: The Return* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Contact: School of Writing and Journalism, Falmouth University, Falmouth Campus, Woodlane, Falmouth TR11 4RH UK.
E-mail: rupert.loydell@falmouth.ac.uk

1. 'Greenbelt is a festival of arts, faith and justice. The best you’ve never heard of. Greenbelt saw its first edition way back in 1974 and has hosted its annual festival every single year since.' ('What is Greenbelt?', Greenbelt website, https://www.greenbelt.org.uk/greenbelt-festival/ [accessed 16 April 2019]) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Unconfirmed rumour has it that Steve Rowles was one of the Tweets on their hit single 'The Birdy Song' (Tweets, The (1981) *Birdie Song* (7" Single), London: PRT. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)