

NOTES: Holy and Horrid 2 'Nothing Obvious' MBRRCD05  
See CD facing page for full list of artists and instrumentation

1. It Was Only a Gypsy 2.28 Thackray c. N.W.R. Music Publishing Co.Ltd

Very few of Jake's 90-odd songs are autobiographical. They are born of acute observational powers delineating our human eccentricities and frailties, & of the ability to conjure up the strangest happen-chances of social collisions, all this under-pinned by a literally marvellous or fantastical imagination. Countless poets and some song-writers have had such powers of course but few of the latter achieve the combination of unrelenting humour, range of topic, unusual tune-shapes, the sound sense of his extra-ordinary use of internal rhymes, often employing many more of these in a song than normal end-rhymes.\* He enjoys lie-ing tales in particular, so much so that many a Jake 'fan' remains convinced of the factual truth of songs with an apparently serious personal-historical scenario (like his spoken introduction to 'Old Molly Metcalfe') only to be disappointed one day (as I was) by the Confidence Trick. So, he might have met a gypsy, but not like this! **Matt Forbes**, of Canterbury, is one of only 5 of the 43 contributors to this series of 5 albums *not* to have made music within the Parish of Rusthall, yet. \*One song, 'Pass MiLord', 3 verses of 8 lines each, has 41 words contributing to these mid-sentence rhymes.

2. Bitter was the Night 1.25 Carter c. Stainer and Bell

I took the idea of the 'Round' Form from an LP 'Lovely in the Dances', a collection of Sydney's songs arranged by Vince Price. The treatment fits in well with this air in the Aeolian Mode, the Round sung with suitable intensity, for the events touched on, **by four women-folk of choral pedigree**.

3. The Apprentice 2.30 Stepto Copyright Control

In view of my comments about **Paul Stepto's** ways and wiles in previous albums, I only need to say here that those people who have never forgotten Jake Thackray's ability to produce memorable songs on topics of the day for the weekly television Shows 'The Frost Report, 'Braden's Beat' years ago may agree that Tonbridge Town may have found a significant satirical Muse of its own. I may be wrong in assuming that punters have seen bits of The Apprentice programme on TV 4, so perhaps you have glimpsed the original American series featuring the American hirer and firer Donald Trump.

4. Timothy Winters 2.01 Causley/Ball M. David Higham Associates

Several people have set this poem to music including one, Leon Rosselson, who is not far behind Jake in the versatile and topical stakes at least. These lyrics stand as Charles Causley's memorable response to a situation and the poem was the subject of a discussion on BBC Radio 4 recently between friends and associates of his in his home-town of Lan-ceston, Cornwall. I learned that he was just as concerned about some of the *apparently* well brought up children attending the Primary School where he taught.

5. Crow on the Cradle 2.09 Carter c. Stainer and Bell

There are three other songs on H&H 1&2 which use the crow-bird as a sign of impending Doom. The use of quotations from Nursery Rhymes\* is an inspired device with which to heighten the shock of an already nihilistic lyric: in the first line there is the portentous breakdown of orderly husbandry, the sheep and cattle trespassing onto lush pasture and arable land respectively. It was written at about the same time as Track 6 on H&H 1, and is also a response to the prevailing fear of nuclear desolation. **Paulette Sheard** and my nephew **David Taylor** provide the duologue.\* Little Boy Blue, & Mary, Mary Quite Contrary.

6. Mixed-up Old Man 1.15 Carter c. Stainer and Bell

From the late 1950s anti-social behaviour began to be given licence by various opinion-forming groups so that existing long-standing taboos were over-turned. 'Hard cases make bad Law' was one such wise and common-sensical old 'saw' set aside. Since then licence has turned into Statute Law and Regulation promulgated by a couple or three generations of Parliamentary derilection. One result has been to deny us the ancient freedom of being allowed to be responsible for our own actions once into the teen-age years. I watched Sydney singing this in a London Coffee Bar in 1961 and thought he had a point but was exaggerating. A far-seeing man, our Sydney (who speaks the introductory line).

7. Pie Jesu 3.40 Archer c. Malcolm Archer

My Advisor at the M.C.P.S., tells me that there 149 musical settings of this work (a text from a liturgical Celebration of Holy Communion/The Lord's Supper, written in Latin, long ago). **Ginette di Palma**, from The Channel Isles but resident in Rusthall, has the ability to move me to tears when singing Devotional songs and arias (the corner of the eyes drip, not the blub-blub variety), and there is a hint at her power of expression in this

less-well known setting of a famous piece in praise of the Lord Jesus. She contributes nowadays to the Oriana Choir of Tunbridge Wells and our local Parish Church in Rusthall. The chorus support is provided by a section of the Parish choir.

8. Bread and Fishes 3.17 Bell c. Tamlyn Music Ltd

**Rex Tucker's** Front Cover painting is drawn from the ancient legend on which the song is based. I was aged 9 when I first heard (from other 9 year olds) the story of the boy Jesus accompanying his merchant uncle, Joseph of Arithemea, on journeys from Palestine to Cornwall and Somersetshire. There existed then a steady trade of Levantine goods for the minerals tin, iron and copper lying in that part of Britain. W. Blake appears to refer to the belief in his poem 'Jerusalem' ("And did those feet in ancient time walk upon England's pastures green ?..). The Gospels are silent about Jesus's life from the age of 2 to 14, and so that makes the claim a not far-fetched one. The party would have travelled by ship or boat from ports like Mara-Zion in Cornwall via coastal waters to the low-lying Somerset Levels, thence to the Mendip (mine-deep) Hills perhaps via Glastonbury Tor / Knoll. Particularly at high-tide the marshy Levels, before drainage, would have afforded inland access for shallow draught boats ('Flatners'), this bit of coast having the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> highest tides, 2<sup>nd</sup> to the Darwin coastline. **Roger Resch's** performance is supported by light harmonies in the chorus.

9. Bitter Withy 2.30 Trad. English

Another legendary tale about the boy Jesus, but this a purely fictional one originating in 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Century manuscripts. There were many such tales of the youth Jesus misusing his miraculous powers at the time, this one being known in much of European oral tradition. This Somerset Levels (front cover) version has Him being beaten by mother Mary for drowning three young high-born lads for not playing football with Him: naturally they couldn't use a rainbow as a river bridge... The whippy Willow besoms, withies / osiers, a speciality of the area, are ideal for basket making – and for chastising wayward youth.

10. Boy Soldier 4.14 Stepto Cpyright Control

The horrific massacres and related tragedies endemic in African countries in recent years can numb the mind. **Paul Stepto** tries to imagine the thoughts and emotions of these boys, many of them aged only 9 or so. He is accompanied by **Pete Metcalfe** on keyboard midi and made the original recording himself.

11. Hymne A L'Amour 1.58 Monnot/Piaf c. Sarl Edimarton

Interlude. My nephew **Alex Tyler** was a choirboy at St. Paul's Parish Church, Rusthall and after a long lay-off returned to singing to help me out. His rich Baritone voice is ideal for this chanson. Alex is married to a French girl, Jake Thackray was influenced by the French *Chansonnier* tradition of popular music and song, and I never did like aspects of the English translation, so in French it is.

12. The Lodger 3.06 Thackray c. N.W.R. Music Publishing Co.Ltd

Like Chaucer in an apologetic postscript to his Canterbury Tales I need to shrive myself for including this piece. Close friends and acquaintances regard me as prude-ish and with some reason in the face of a licentious sexual mores aspects of which I have found truly repugnant for most of my life. So what am I doing having this piece of outway lewdness on a Rusthall Record? Well, it's Horrid, especially in Mixed company, and something on these two albums are supposed to make the odd listener recoil apoplectically (and Jake himself thought it one he wished he hadn't given birth to). Also, decently living, upstanding Family men whom I have time for are sent into paroxysms of laughter by the thing. Thirdly, it displays an aspect of Jake's craftsmanship: his remarkable use of internal rhymes, mid-sentence assonances which create its own word-music. In the 4 up-tempo 8-line stanzas there are 40 words which contribute to these, additional to the end-rhymes. Despite Jake's range of topic, most of his songs empathise with and celebrate women-folk in all their variety and, except for 'My Dear Old Duch(ess)' of Music Hall fame, wrote the most moving tribute to married love that I can think of ('To Do With You'). But, as he said once, "nevertheless, I reserve the right to take the micky". Like the great Elizabethan playwright Thomas Middleton, Jake makes much of human sexuality, and both treat the matter in a mature, elegant and highly amusing way, and are never merely smutty or voyeuristic. This might be an exception? **Matt Forbes** of Canterbury provides.

13. Litany to the Holy Spirit 2.20 Herrick/Hurford c. Oxford University Press

A litany is a series of short prayers. Peter Hurford's 20<sup>th</sup> century musical setting of Herrick's 17<sup>th</sup> century poem I find affecting, especially when I think of it as a child's prayer. **Jennifer Johnson** provides.

14. Last Valentine's Day 2.54 Trad English

**Pig's Ear** add interest to this old hunting song with their clever arrangement. A combination of Townees' ignorance of country life and the class hatred of the Labour Party 'Left' led to another blow to an ancient freedom. Anti-hunting meat-eaters should treat themselves to a day at a slaughter-house, preferably one of the large ones foisted on us by the E.U., where they will observe animals brutally cauterised as they wait – in a long queue. “..bold Ren..” is short for reynolds /reynard the fox.

15. Lah Di Dah 2.46 Thackray N.W.R. Music Publishing Co. Ltd

This Wedding Breakfast item is one of **Matt Forbes**'s favourite Jake-songs. The marriage lasted.

16. Hartlake Bridge 3.04 Stepto Copyright control

This dreadful event occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at Golden Green, near Tonbridge. The associated gypsy song came to public attention only in the 1970s, though **Paul Stepto**'s powerful song was stimulated by historical documents rather than the Gypsy folk's own creation.

17. Remember Bethlehem 3.16 Thackray c.N.W.R. Music Publishing

Like 'Joseph' on the previous CD, H&H 1 'The New Road' this piece was written for the Intake School in Leeds where Jake was teaching. Jake's deep Christian faith comes out not only in the impassioned lyrics of this song but also in his fervent performances of it. The worshipfulness of the animals, trees, wind, rain and sun provides a link with 'Carol of the Creatures' on H&H 1.

18. Black Crow 2.57 Shepherd Copyright Control

I'm delighted to have West Kent's leading Folk Group on Holy and Horrid 1 & 2. **Pig's Ear**'s arrangement of this alarming piece develops in their unique way styles of unaccompanied group singing I associate with distinguished forbears like the Waterson Family, the Copper Family, the Young Tradition, acoustic Steeleye Span, and the old English ('West Gallery') and East Coast American ('Shape-Note') Devotional singing styles.

19. The Devil wore a Crucifix 1.04 Carter Stainer and Bell

Whenever I hear people blame the existence of war on the Christian Religion I reach for this lyric and quote parts of it. I have learned the hard way that, if in a Public House at the time, I firstly calculate how much they have drunk.

20. The American Way 3.45 Stepto Copyright Control

The world has much to thank the U.S.A. for, but in recent years the cultural & social side of its innovatory genius begins to pall. It's not their fault: you don't **have** to be influenced by all the television-borne neologisms and fashions. The innovation of men's jeans designed ballet-tights tight in the 1960s (crutch-crushers I called them) brought to mind Chaucer's comment on a similar sight in the 14<sup>th</sup> century: “with those breeches..he resembled a she-ape on heat in the full light of the moon”.

21. Three Masts 1.46 Causley/Ball c. David Higham & Associates

I set many of Charles Causley's poems to some form of music. This, I hope, may work better than most. The tune, sung here by **Paulette Sheard** of Five Oak Green, West Kent, is a re-working of an English folksong entitled 'Monday Morning' or 'Tuesday Morning'.

22. Neo-Colonial Boy 1.58 Ball/ Trad.Australian C.C/P.D.

Were there room on this Inlay Card I would go into some detail. As it is, it remains a summary of the sham-rockery I've observed in evenings of amateur music-making, in Folk clubs and the like, experienced in some seven cities in four English-speaking countries, overseas.

23. The Easter Tree 2.25 Goulder c. Robbins Music Ltd

**Peter Collins**, the extra-ordinarily well-connected doyen of Kent & Sussex Folk and Acoustic Music goings-on, tells me that this morbid piece, red in tooth & claw & human hand, is uniquely untypical of Dave Goulder's output.

24. Romance 0.52 Thackray N.W.R. Music Publishing

I think of this as Romeo and Ethel. Jake sometimes used this for his 2<sup>nd</sup> Encore.

25. Chocolate 4.03 Stepto Copyright Control I;, .; Neither holy nor horrid as far as I can see, so another Interlude, tastefully choc-ey.

26. Rolling in the Dew 2.00 Trad English

**Carol Wilkinson** uses a different cast of words and tune for this version of the same song (on Track 24 Holy & Horrid No.1 The New Road) when telling this pastoral tale of how an ingratiating and nose-y Cad was dealt with. The differences illustrate the inventiveness of the anonymous carriers of these old folksongs. My mother was a milkmaid and dairymaid in her teens.

27. I Come Like a Beggar with a Gift 1.47 Carter c. Stainer & Bell

To get over the idea of the Kingdom/Kingship of God/Heaven, Jesus in the Gospels employed the paradox as well as the Parable, these devices allowing us to cope with a difficult abstract idea by providing a picture for the mind. Totalitarian politicians and the like do the opposite, hiding their true intentions behind a fog of abstract language, avoiding pictures for the mind in case we catch their drift.

#### **Rusthall Records Mixed Programming Series**

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*This CD is dedicated to my father Dick Ball who, when at home, piano-played a little boy to sleep during the Blitz.*

**Sponsored by John and Di Cullen proprietors of The Beacon Bar and Restaurant, Rusthall, Tunbridge Wells. Thanks are due to Gray Cooper, sound engineer and co-producer, for his musical creativity and meticulous attention to detail. Amateur artist Rex Tucker & I struck up a friendship in Bath 6 decades ago. Presently he lives in Petersfield, Hants.**

*Jake's output is available on 'Jake in a Box', a set of 4 CDs by EMI Records Ltd*

**M. R. Ball  
20<sup>th</sup> November 2007**