

Andy Partridge Biography 2006

As the main songwriter and one of the founding members of **XTC** way back in 1975, Andy Partridge has found himself in the enviable position of being regarded as one of Britain's foremost songwriters. His reputation for highly crafted and memorable songs has seen a whole raft of bands list him as a major influence. Consequently today there are many bands whose sound seems remarkable reminiscent of **XTC**.

Still active with **XTC**, although now trimmed down to a core duo with Colin Moulding, they recently released their first boxed set on their own Idea Records. Titled 'Apple Box' the boxed set is a 4CD set compiling the 54 tracks from *Apple Venus Vol 1* and *Wasp Star* and their respective demo albums.

Andy and Colin had conceived the idea of presenting two contrasting sides to **XTC** over two lps as a double album. Commercial pressures led this to become 2 albums released in rapid succession 'Apple Venus Vol 1' released in 1999 and 'Wasp Star' in 2000. This boxed sets re-unites those albums as they were originally intended with the added bonus of the demo recordings for each.

Even before they began the sessions for Volume 1 in 1998, they had amassed a whole range of songs (four album's worth, in truth) that conceptually fell into two categories. Accordingly, '*Wasp Star*' presents more of a group sound, a far more electric, rock-based form compared to the acoustic/orchestral variations of the first volume. Where '*Apple Venus Volume 1*' all but abandoned normal form for experimental sounding songs, intricate orchestrations and complex vocal overdubs, '*Wasp Star*' starts out with simple song structures and then embellishes them with inventive melodies, beautifully crafted vocals and brain twisting lyricism.

Compared to the chamber pop of the first volume, '*Wasp Star*' is, for the most part, **XTC** displaying their hard rock side. The remainder, of course, is hardly rock at all but the sort of consummate, articulate pop we've come to expect from **XTC** over the years.

All the songs for '*Wasp Star*' were newly recorded during autumn 1999 and completed in February 2000 by Messrs Partridge and Moulding who, between them, played everything bar the drums and the occasional string and brass parts. Recordings were undertaken at **XTC**'s own purpose built studios in Colin's garden and mixed at Rockfield. Whatever the instrumentation, what unites the two volumes is, naturally enough, the unimpeachable song writing (three by Colin/nine by Andy), their love of wordplay and impeccable vocal harmonies and arrangements. Prior to '*Apple Venus Volume 1*', released in February 1999, **XTC** hadn't released a record since 1992. Now, seven years may seem like a long time but for the first five of those years, **XTC** were rather famously on strike from their former label Virgin Records. After such a hiatus, **XTC** had to return with something memorable and '*Apple Venus Volume 1*' was just that. Indeed, it was arguably their most overtly ambitious and most critically acclaimed lp to date, recalling the highlights of '*Skylarking*' and '*Nonsuch*' (that final lp for Virgin in 1992).

'*Apple Venus Volume 1*' was, as one would expect, non-conformity at its most brilliant, luscious orchestral pop that sounded like nothing else released 1999. Any 'comeback' is tricky and in seven years much had changed, of course, but critics and fans alike were unanimous in welcoming **XTC** back once again.

Reviewers certainly did not hold back on the critical plaudits:

" 'Apple Venus' is a joyful, Technicolor return. ' (Daily Telegraph)

'A quintessential new olde English classic' (The Guardian')

'This is pop art craftsmanship to make Britpop's finest blush' (The Sunday Times)

'This is the sound of XTC, the first sound anyone's heard for nigh on six years, and it's overwhelming.' (Uncut)

'The whole thing becomes an impossible triumph and you are willing to accept just about everything in 1999 that XTC can throw at you...a fully realised, brilliantly sustained flight of aural fancy.' (Mojo)

XTC had released 10 lps for Virgin Records over the years prior to *'Apple Venus Volume 1'*, having ridden in on the coast-tails of punk with the punchy, jerky, angular rhythms of *'White Music'* in 1978 and *'Go2'* the same year. A brace of lp's with producer Steve Lillywhite extended their range and reputation further – the first of these (*'Drum And Wires'*) earned the band it's first Top Twenty hit with *'Making Plans For Nigel'* in 1979. Further hits followed, *'Generals And Majors'*, *'Sgt Rock (Is Going To Help Me)'* and *'Senses Working Overtime'* among them. *'The Disappointed'* from *'Nonsuch'* was their last British Top 20 hit in April 1992.

They dispensed with Lillywhite's services for 1982's *'English Settlement'* (one of several contenders as their masterpiece) and from this period on became known for their variety, notoriety, ingenuity and originality. It was also one of the lp's that truly extended their reputation in America, *'Skylarking'* being the other. *'Skylarking'* was produced by Todd Rundgren, working mostly at his Woodstock, NY studio. It spent over six months on the US charts.

From here on, through lps such as the aforementioned *'Skylarking'* (1986) and *'Oranges And Lemons'* (1989) and *'Nonsuch'* (1992), not to mention the Dukes Of Stratosphear experiments with psychedelia, XTC continued to set their own high standards. Their music was invariably impossible to categorise. Had they chosen to conform to writing straight pop songs they would undeniably have sold 10 times as many records as they did. Instead they always went their own way, living by their own rules and producing music that ranged from pure pop to psychedelia, from textured folk to orchestral majesty.

In the year 2006, nothing changes in the world of XTC, except change itself. On their return in 1999, most critics asked 'where do XTC stand in the 1999 scheme of things?' Nobody had an answer. So where do they stand in the year 2006? Same place, out on the periphery and out there in a class of their own.

Back in 2004 Andy took the giant step and set up his own Ape House Records, his chance to release records by artists whose music he loves and put out some of his own recordings. To date the Ape roster boasts 'Orpheus The Lowdown' an album Andy recorded with Peter Blegvad, an intriguing tale set to music recorded by Peter and Andy, Brighton's Milk & Honey Band and Canadian singer songwriter Veda Hille.

In a vain attempt to quell the tide of bootlegs of his material on the market, Andy decided it was time to delve into his archive and release some of the demos he's recorded over the years and also songs that never made onto XTC albums. The Fuzzy Warbles Series was borne. Volumes 1-6 are available now with 7-8 due out in September 2006. Volumes 7 and 8 will complete the set and to accompany these there will also be a very special collectors album available for fans to keep them in released in October 2006

What next, well, Andy is currently writing material for an as yet named project, with ex XTC keyboard man Barry Andrews and Shriekbacks drummer Martyn Barker for a release later this year on Ape.