

MATT HILL – AUTOBIOGRAPHY. *Half a century of songs.*



Childhood – Elvis, Country music and Miner’s Welfares

I was born in 1970 and raised in the Nottinghamshire mining town of Eastwood, hometown of author DH Lawrence, in fact I went to the same school as him. Both my Mum and Dad’s families originate in Radford – the area of Nottingham made famous in the books of Alan Sillitoe.

Music has been with me as long as I can remember. My earliest memory is of playing Wally Whyton records. As a child I was obsessed with Elvis Presley, and luckily for me

there was an Elvis shop just three miles up the road in Heanor. I thought every town had one but turns out it was the only one in Britain. What are the chances? My love of country music was seeded early, listening to Don Williams and Dr. Hook tapes in my Dad’s Ford Capri. By the early 1980s I was borrowing my sister’s vinyl to hear bands like Squeeze, The Pretenders and Elvis Costello. When I was 14 me and my mates formed a band. Within a year or two we were out playing covers of 50s/60s rock n roll on the local circuit of Working Men’s Clubs and Miner’s Welfare’s.

My twenties – Living with the La’s, discovering alt.country, USA adventures.

In 1988 I left Eastwood Comprehensive School and went to Liverpool University. I was singer and songwriter in an indie band called The Bellis and did a couple of demos. (recently one of our songs was featured on a vinyl compilation put out by Record Collector and Rough Trade) We lived in this huge ramshackle slum house called Brucklay. Our downstairs neighbour was John Power from the La’s and they used to practice there sometimes. After Liverpool I moved to Nottingham and for 5 years worked for the Independent Living Fund, providing funding to people with severe disabilities. I had a short stint with Nottingham folk-punk-country-cajun band Seven Little Sisters who introduced me to Bluegrass and taught me a lot about traditional music.



In 1996 I packed in my job and took an extended roadtrip across America. I went to Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans, Austin, Roswell, Truth or Consequences, The Rockies, Utah, Las Vegas, Area 51, San Francisco. I was becoming really interested in the new alt.country music that was happening like the Jayhawks, Whiskeytown and Wilco. When I got back to the UK, after a brief spell of homelessness, hostels, bedsits and sofa surfing I ended up in Manchester.

In these early days of the internet I joined the alt.country 'Postcard' newsgroup and connected with likeminded people across the UK. Through 'Postcard' I met music fan Mick Spencer and under the name "Cosmic American" we began to build a network of promoters and venues to start offering UK tours to American acts. My claim to fame is that I did the Visa paperwork for now disgraced superstar Ryan Adam's first solo UK trip. My proudest achievement from those days was in 2000 when me and Mick put together the hugely memorable revue tour with Chicago's legendary Bloodshot records.

My thirties – Touring, releasing albums, Jeremy Kyle, Jimmy Savile and Westminster

I promoted a lot Americana gigs in Manchester and was inspired to start playing music again. I would get up and do the support slots. Playing solo acoustic after a lifetime of playing in bands was a steep learning curve but I was given support and encouragement, particularly from Chris Mills and Neal Casal, who were both masters of the solo



performance. Soon I was performing around the UK, opening shows for artists such as Joe Pernice, Richard Buckner, Neko Case, Slaid Cleaves, Kim Richey and Lambchop. Things were looking promising. I self-released some EPs, got some great reviews but attempts to release an album were seriously curtailed by an unexpected heart problem in 2002.

My debut album 'Secret Ruler of the World' eventually came out in 2004 on Circus 65 records who had released albums by The Guthries, Chris Mills and the Havenots. It was at this time I decided to adopt a stage name and so Matt Hill was renamed "Quiet Loner". The album got widespread acclaim and was even voted Americana UK Album of the Year. It remains my most successful album. It would be 6 years before I released another one.

Life moved on. I moved to Essex. My day job career with charity Carers UK started to get interesting and amazing. I got to go on the radio and TV. I went on the Jeremy Kyle show. I was often in Whitehall and Parliament or at the Party Conferences. I regularly met MPs and Ministers. I even met Jimmy Savile. But best of all I travelled the country meeting carers – those inspiring amazing tenacious people who keep our country afloat. I made some lifelong friends and I learned a huge amount about people, about family, about hardship and about love. I didn't know it at the time but it would all serve to enrich my songwriting.

UK Americana Chart

- 1 (4) Quiet Loner - *Secret Ruler of the World* (Circus 65)
- 2 (1) Daniel Wylie - *Ramshackle Beauty* (Measured)
- 3 (-) Jesse Sykes and the Sweet Hereafter - *Oh My Girl* (Fargo)
- 4 (2) Bonnie Prince Billy - *Greatest Palace Music* (Domino)
- 5 (-) Stills - *Logic Will Break Your Heart* (679)
- 6 (-) Mary Chapin Carpenter - *Between Here and Gone* (Sony)
- 7 (-) Richmond Fontaine - *Post to Wire* (El Cortez)
- 8 (-) Chasing Dorotea - *Chasing Dorotea* (Stereo Test Kits)
- 9 (-) Josh Ritter - *Hello Starling* (Setanta)
- 10 (-) James William Hindle - *Prospect Park* (Track and Field)

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My forties. Songwriter in residence, Glastonbury debut and community artist

As I turned 40 I was living in London and really getting back into music. Music promoter Rory Carlile showed some faith in me and gave me a residency at the Gladstone pub in Southwark which I called 'Quiet Loner's Journey to the Netherworld'. It was a real confidence boost, as was meeting a whole load of brilliant songwriters like Dan Raza, Greg Rees and Ben Folke Thomas. In 2010 I released Spectrology and worked with some top British folk musicians like Inge Thomson (She's played with Karine Polwart and Will Oldham) and Roy Dodds (Fairground Attraction/Eddi Reader). It got 4-star reviews from the likes of Uncut and The Daily Mirror and radio play on BBC6 Music. In 2011 I left London and moved to the Peak District. The next project was a live album of modern protest songs called 'Greedy Magicians'. This led to an invite from Billy Bragg to perform on the Leftfield stage at 2013 Glastonbury Festival where I found myself in a songwriters circle sandwiched between Billy and Amanda Palmer. Almost as strange as being on Jeremy Kyle.



I started to meet other musicians who wrote political songs. In 2015 I helped set up 'We Shall Overcome' an anti-austerity movement that uses live music to offer support and solidarity with those hit by cuts, poverty and homelessness. I started The Defiance Sessions one of the few regular music nights in the UK dedicated to songwriting that has a political or conscientious aspect.



After a lifetime of playing music I finally became a full-time self-employed musician aged 46. My first big job was to be 'songwriter-in-residence' at the People's History Museum in Manchester, resulting in a touring show (and album) 'The Battle for the Ballot' telling the story of the fight for the right to vote. That show played in venues and festivals across the country and led to me being invited to showcase at the English Folk Expo. Since then my work as a community artist has included an album co-written with people at a homeless project and a stint as a resident musician in a prison. More recently I've been teaching protest songs to toddlers and co-writing songs with people living with dementia.

In 2020 I turned 50. It seemed the right time to ditch the Quiet Loner name and so I will release my next album under my own name. Finally, I'm Matt Hill again.

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