

Gary Pickford-Hopkins: A Life Of Music

Our Rock here at the mouth of the Mediterranean Sea appears to be something of a magnet for talented and well-known musicians from all corners of the globe. We seem to be musically blessed here in Gibraltar with the endless supply of different styles, personalities and instrumental performances displayed by locals and 'foreigners' alike.

One such musician who inspired many of us here on the Rock was Welshman Gary Pickford-Hopkins, who visited this summer. His guitar skills, lyrical ingenuity and powerful voice mesmerized all who saw him perform and Globe magazine was interested in talking to the man himself to find out how he has become the professional musician he is today, the musical route which brought him here and how he enjoyed performing with other musicians on the Rock.

Gary, 55, from Neath, Wales was brought up surrounded by music, his family being very musically orientated operatically and growing up under the influence of musicians like Ray Charles, Buddy Holly and Jerry Lee Lewis. He was a mere 16 years old when he formed his first band, 'The Smokestacks', a name that reflected the area they were in at the time in Wales. The band lasted around 2 years having fun and developing their musical talent and inventiveness. Gary then formed another band by the name of 'Eyes Of Blue', together with the keyboard player from the Welsh band 'Man', Phil Ryan, and a man who greatly influences much of Gary's most recent work here in Gibraltar guitarist Ray 'Taff' Williams. This new band remained together for around 5 years and recorded 3 albums for Mercury Records before Ray and Phil moved on to work with the lyricist behind Eric Clapton and Cream, Pete Brown. In the mean time, Gary went on to form the band 'Wild Turkey' between '71 and '74 in conjunction with the bassist from 'Jethro Tull', Glenn Cornick. The band toured the US and Europe and recorded 2 albums for Chrysalis Records. Gary then met 'Yes' keyboard player Rick Wakeman and they recorded two of their biggest albums: 'Journey To The Centre Of The Earth' and 'King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table'. The band was extremely successful as was reflected by the reaction of their fans during their world tour where they visited Japan, Australia, New Zealand, US and Canada. Gary then met up with Ray once again and 'The House Band' was formed between '79 and '80, including the members of Bonnie Tyler's band. 'The House Band' then became 'The Broadcasters', with 'Dire Straits' drummer Terry Williams, who was a childhood friend of Gary's. After around 2 years, today's band 'Steel Water' was formed. Gary then produced his first ever solo album 'GPH', which came out on April the 14th of this year under Angel Air Records.

While Gary was here on the Rock, he appeared at several venues including The Lord Nelson, performing songs from his new album and playing alongside local

musicians. He also performed on stage during the Summer Nights festivities in Casemates Square. This was Gary's fourth or fifth visit to Gibraltar and according to him, certainly not his last! 'I really love the atmosphere here. Everyone is very friendly and the musicians are keen to join in and try something new. Many of the musicians I have met this time and in the past have become good friends of mine and I will always come back to Gibraltar'.

Gary plans to carry on with Ray and 'Steel Water' and gig in Wales, England and hopefully other venues more further afield. He is keen to produce another solo album and is due to record another 'Wild Turkey' album by the end of this year, hopefully featuring guest appearances from well known musicians, such as Bonnie Tyler in the song 'Loving You Means Leaving You' from his solo album 'GPH'.

Gary's music is individual, touching and uplifting, all at the same time! He has a wonderful voice and his lyrics are meaningful and well thought out. Each of the songs on his solo album has something for everyone and is definitely a good buy. Gary Pickford-Hopkins was impressed with the Rock and its people and hopes to return soon, almost as much as we hope to see him again! His music was inspiring to many and he has definitely left his mark amongst the locals and his friends. He wishes to thank all those from the Rock On The Rock Club who made his visit possible, especially to James Martin who did most of the PR work and Tour Operator Albert Parody. He would also like to thank all the musicians and friends who made his stay enjoyable and fun. Globe magazine awaits Gary's return with baited breath and wishes him every success in whatever he chooses to do!

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