



ALDORA BRITAIN RECORDS

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"Tomorrow's Music Today"

FEATURING

The Mysterious Wheels, Bruce Madden, Boa,
Til Willis, Louis B Burrows, Diaspora, Tom Andes,
Genevieve Jaide, The Stigmatics, and Out Of Hands

Compiled and written by Tom Hilton

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“We all deserve a chance to join in the dance...”

Jacob Tucker, Grey Star Ghost

Same Shoes New Blues

Andrew Ranken is a name that has become synonymous with contemporary Irish music. As the beat-keeper in Celtic punk originators The Pogues, Ranken was part of a rock and roll juggernaut that sold millions of records and toured all over the world. He was an integral part of this chapter of rock and roll history, and a mainstay of the band from the early days of 1984's *Red Roses For Me* until the final tour in 2014. Ranken, however, had a love that was concealed from the limelight for many decades. 'I spent thirty-five years playing drums for The Pogues, a slight interruption to singing the blues'.

Step in **THE MYSTERIOUS WHEELS**, a raucous and authentic British rhythm and blues outfit, fronted by Ranken, who have all the grit, earthiness and raw-mindedness to make a real impact in any true music fan's record collection. Having been a band for over forty years, they have recently started committing their musings to tape. 2015's *Reach Out Hold On*, and the follow-up, 2021's aptly-titled *Same Shoes New Blues*. One thing is plainly evident from even a quick conversation with Ranken, he still has all the passion and love for playing music as he had all those years ago. Whether it be pounding the drums as a backdrop to Shane MacGowan's lyrical missives, or front and centre channelling the spirit of Howlin' Wolf or Robert Johnson, this is the man's true calling. Amid the endless British heatwave, Ranken kindly took some time to talk to *Aldora Britain Records* about his rhythm and blues odyssey.

The Mysterious Wheels previously contributed his track 'Corncrake Blues' to our 'Renaud' compilation. Listen and download [HERE](#).

Aldora Britain Records: Hi Andrew, how are you? It is a true honour to be chatting with you. As a drummer myself, I remember watching your performances with The Pogues in awe. Thank you for your time! I was wondering if we could start off by stepping inside the time machine. What are some of your earliest musical memories and what first pushed you towards pursuing this passion of yours?

Andrew Ranken: Earliest musical memories are probably big band jazz, children's favourites, Gilbert and Sullivan, folk songs, Irish songs, hymns. Then, of course, along came The Beatles and The Rolling Stones and a volcano erupted. Nothing had ever been so exciting.

Aldora Britain Records: Today we are going to focus on your fantastic new project The Mysterious Wheels. But I think it would almost be rude to not at least ask one Pogues question, if you will indulge me! The band that was your 'interruption to playing the blues'! I am most



fascinated by the early days of the band and how this idea all came together. The crossing of punk and traditional Irish music... genius! How were you first exposed to this idea? How did you come to be part of the band? What was the initial spark?

Andrew Ranken: I knew Shane a bit when we both lived in King's Cross and used to drink in the same pubs. We used to moan about the New Romantics and put Irish songs on the jukebox. I was playing drums in an R&B band at the time, and he and Jem tracked me down to my flat one day from the racket of me practicing. They said they were putting a band together to do Irish music and would I audition for them. Well, it was a very ramshackle affair, but I liked it, and it felt like there was something really good going on. Then I didn't hear from them for ages until one day they asked if I could audition again. 'I already have', I said, somewhat perplexed. 'Ah, but this is different', they replied, 'You're only allowed two drums, a snare and a floor tom, and you have to stand up to play them. No cymbals, but you can have a saucepan lid'.



It was a challenge. The rhythms were quite rudimentary, but I had to develop a whole new technique to play them. Anyway, it worked, and I got the job, and things took off very quickly. The music had that totally infectious thing of great hooks, great melodies and a really driving beat. Plus, of course, the wonderful lyrics and the impossibly handsome musicians.

Aldora Britain Records: And now, let's make a jump to The Mysterious Wheels. This is raw, authentic British R&B. It is infectious, adrenaline-fuelled and full of energy. How did this sound come to you? What would you say goes into the band's style and who are your biggest influences for The Mysterious Wheels?

Andrew Ranken: It was through The Beatles and The Stones that I began to learn about black American blues, R&B and soul. Cover versions of Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters et al lead me to seek out the originals. Not an easy task for a penniless pre-teen living in a village in East Sussex that had one radio shop that occasionally sold LPs. Not that most of them were worth buying. But I passed my eleven plus and went to grammar school in the county town of Lewes. What an eye opener. The place was full of music and musicians, and I very quickly got kicked out of music classes at school for shouting too loud – some things never change.

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Turn over for more The Mysterious Wheels...



I got friendly with people who had real blues records and I bought a copy of *The BB King Story Vol. 1* from the stall outside the station, which used to sell cut-price records. I learnt every song on it off by heart and can still remember most of them. Also, the British blues boom was happening. John Mayall was everywhere, and Peter Green's original Fleetwood Mac were a fantastic band. Blues was cool, and it got inside me and is still hanging on in there. I joined a school band that did a few blues numbers, and I seem to have been doing that ever since. However, I never had the po-faced in a rut puritanical sort of approach that you sometimes come across. I want my band to play from the heart, and I want my band to move! And folks to start dancing, and that just makes me want to play all night.

“The British blues boom was happening ... Blues was cool, and it got inside me and is still hanging on in there.”

In terms of style, there are loads of influences. All the way back to Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith and so many others. Then there's the whole Chicago scene. Muddy Waters, Buddy Guy, and again too many others to mention. I love New Orleans music as well. What a place! So many brilliant drummers. Earl Palmer is sublime. Brilliant. Everything else as well. Smiley Lewis is a favourite of mine, and Professor Longhair and Doctor John, both completely knock me out. But the man for me,

above all, has to be Chester Burnett, the one and only Howlin' Wolf. About fifty years ago I heard him sing the line, 'Asked her for water, she gave me gasoline', and I thought yeah, and I bet you drank it. He seems to inhabit a world where the darkness is so intense you could be murdered on your front porch without even seeing the murderer standing in front of you. He takes the blues and turns it upside down, inside out, and tears it apart. The voice, the guitars, the harmonica, the drums and bass will all sometimes pull like hell in different directions, yet it all somehow holds together. Sheer genius.

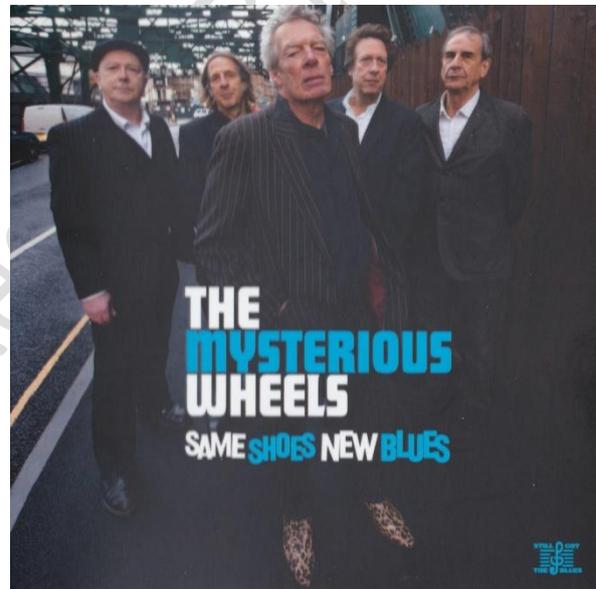
“I never had the po-faced in a rut puritanical sort of approach that you sometimes come across. I want my band to play from the heart, and I want my band to move! And folks to start dancing, and that just makes me want to play all night.”

Aldora Britain Records: You committed the band’s sound to tape in 2015 with your well-received debut *Reach Out Hold On*. This came with the help of Ace Records and was launched on Denmark Street. This must have been a pretty exciting time, decades after The Mysterious Wheels first jammed. How do you reflect back on this time now?

Andrew Ranken: Actually, it was a rather confusing time. We’d found this bloke who was supposed to be working as our agent and getting things moving around the album launch. But really, he did bugger all, except ogle Nikki, our backing singer. He was also impossible to communicate with, so he got the heave-ho, but unfortunately he’d already managed to make quite a mess of things.

Aldora Britain Records: *Same Shoes New Blues* was the follow-up and my own personal introduction to the band. A gem of a record if you don’t mind me saying! The lives of the band members had changed in the interim, and the world changed a fair bit too. How did this record come together? What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing it?

Andrew Ranken: *Same Shoes New Blues* was an attempt to make a record of all original material. I’m not a very prolific writer, but I’ve always got a few things bubbling away in the back kitchen. So, I put it all together, with help from Joe and Simon, which inspired some new stuff as well, and we thrashed things out in rehearsals until we felt ready to record. We also had a new guitarist, Patmo Sheeran, and a new drummer, Lou Salvoni – actually, Lou and I go back a very long time, I think we were in the ark together. So, the record was a way of establishing the new line-up. I also wanted to get it done while I felt well enough as I was getting increasingly ill from COPD and going through a lot of hospital treatment. It turned out to be a lot of fun, the recording that is. A bit rough around the edges, but then so are we.



This was all pre-COVID though, so we only managed to do a couple of gigs with the new material before we were grounded for the duration. There hasn’t actually been a proper release yet. But we’re all still here and still together. So, we’re working towards it. We’ll keep you posted!

Aldora Britain Records: I would like to finish off by singling out some of the songs from the album. ‘Corncrake Blues’, ‘Laughing Moon’ and ‘Weed Seed’, some personal favourites! What are the stories behind these songs, did anything in particular inspire them, and what do they mean to you?

Andrew Ranken: ‘Corncrake Blues’, the corncrake is a symbol of loss. A very rare bird these days. The song is inspired thematically by the beautiful Irish song ‘Carrickfergus’. It’s an older man in poor health reminiscing about young love basically, and wondering if there’s anything left.



'Laughing Moon', an unfaithful couple.

'Weed Seed', I love jazz and came across a story once about the bands who toured America constantly. Often playing two shows a day, staying in crummy hotels and driving thousands of miles. An awful lot of reefer got smoked and Louis Armstrong had a prodigious appetite for it. In order not to get caught short when supplies were running low, musicians got into the habit of scattering the good seed on the land at any place they stopped along the way.

Fast forward to The Pogues with Joe Strummer touring the US, late eighties or early nineties, and approaching the Canadian border. Joe was concerned that we clean out the bus, having had previous trouble with Canadian customs, and we were also very enthusiastic pot smokers. So, we stopped at the last gas station before the border to get rid of incriminating evidence. Needing to relieve myself, I wandered into the buses at the back of the gas station. I suddenly realised I was peeing into a chest high clump of marijuana. It was like a miracle, and I wondered if Louis himself had planted it!

Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Andrew:** Howlin' Wolf, you already know why.

AB Records: Favourite album? **Andrew:** *Electric Ladyland*. Blues from outer space as only Hendrix could play them.

AB Records: First gig? **Andrew:** The Tremeloes on a floating stage on a lake in a park in Tunbridge Wells. About 1964/65. I loved the electric sound, the amps, the drums and the volume. My mum tried to get me to do the twist.

AB Records: Style icon? **Andrew:** Miles Davis in green shirt on the cover of *Milestones*.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Andrew:** *Some Like It Hot*. I laugh just thinking about it.

AB Records: Favourite up and coming artist? **Andrew:** Wet Leg. Also very funny and great videos.