

Gordon Giltrap

Equally at home as an acoustic troubadour or leader of the band Gordon Giltrap reflects on creative highs, management lows and looking like Roxy Music...

Words: Rich Wilson

IT'S AN INJUSTICE that acoustic guitarist Gordon Giltrap, despite having a career that has extended over forty years, remains forever tied to that solitary, seventies hit single *Heartsong*. However, he's released a string of overtly progressive albums, such as the highly regarded *Perilous Journey*, with the Gordon Giltrap Band, as well as creating a varied back-catalogue of solo work after that band's dissolution in the early 80s. Falling between the seemingly immovable musical pillars of folk and prog while battling a sequence of struggles with managers has ensured that his work has, for the most part, been away from the limelight. Despite this, his new solo album, *Shining Morn* confirms that his music remains as charming as ever.

Do you regard *Heartsong* as a millstone around your neck?

I think that would be true if I didn't like the music. I absolutely love hearing and playing *Heartsong* as it's an exhilarating piece of music. Although I did an all-star version with Brian May in 1993, my favourite is still the original as it has its own kind of magic. To a degree, it really was a fluke, as instrumental music doesn't normally get into the charts. If it had vocals, I think it would just have got lost in among all the other songs over the years. And of course it was great that the TV programme *Holiday* used it as their theme. So yes, I'm very proud of it. It would be nice to have had a string of instrumental hits like Vangelis but I think it's still fairly timeless.

Given your background as an acoustic solo artist, how did you come to form the Gordon Giltrap Band?

At that time, I was writing music which was in a very medieval baroque ensemble style and I met the rest of the guys when I was doing a session. A few months later, I remembered those guys so I gave them a call and played them my demos. The next thing I knew, they were putting bass and drums on the music, which was something I'd never thought of. It took me quite a while to get my head around the fact that the music had more potential in a rock field, but they had the vision and made it happen. I wasn't playing electric guitar then, but they encouraged me to play it and it somehow worked. I've never taken my electric guitar playing seriously but I'm now thinking about doing an album that harks back to my prog rock days.

Why did you decide to dissolve the Gordon Giltrap band?

In the late 70s and early 80s, I was going through great changes in my personal life, with a divorce and a family member dying, and then my record company [The Electric Record Company] closed down. The advent of punk affected things and it became increasingly difficult to keep a band together. I had some great band members then. For example, my drummer at that time was Ian Mosley, who went on to work with Steve Hackett and then joined Marillion. People started to

move on to other things and it was difficult to keep it together. When I was successful, I had a strong management team who would put the tours together, but when the hit records stopped coming they weren't interested in me any more. So the infrastructure was stripped away from me and I went back to playing acoustic guitar.

Obviously your work since has generally been a solo pursuit. Is there a part of you that would have enjoyed the challenge of continuing as part of a band?

Yes, I would have liked that but then I have always been a bit of a loner and known what I have wanted musically. It wasn't that my compositions were superior to what my band members were writing, as they were all very talented people, but they weren't coming up with anything that was unique or had the same vision that I had. But in all honesty, at that time, I was probably floundering anyway. You have peaks and troughs in your career and life, and in all honesty I do think that the best music I have written has been since those progressive rock days. I'm writing music that I love; I've complete autonomy and I'm not looking at whether my music is going to be successful.

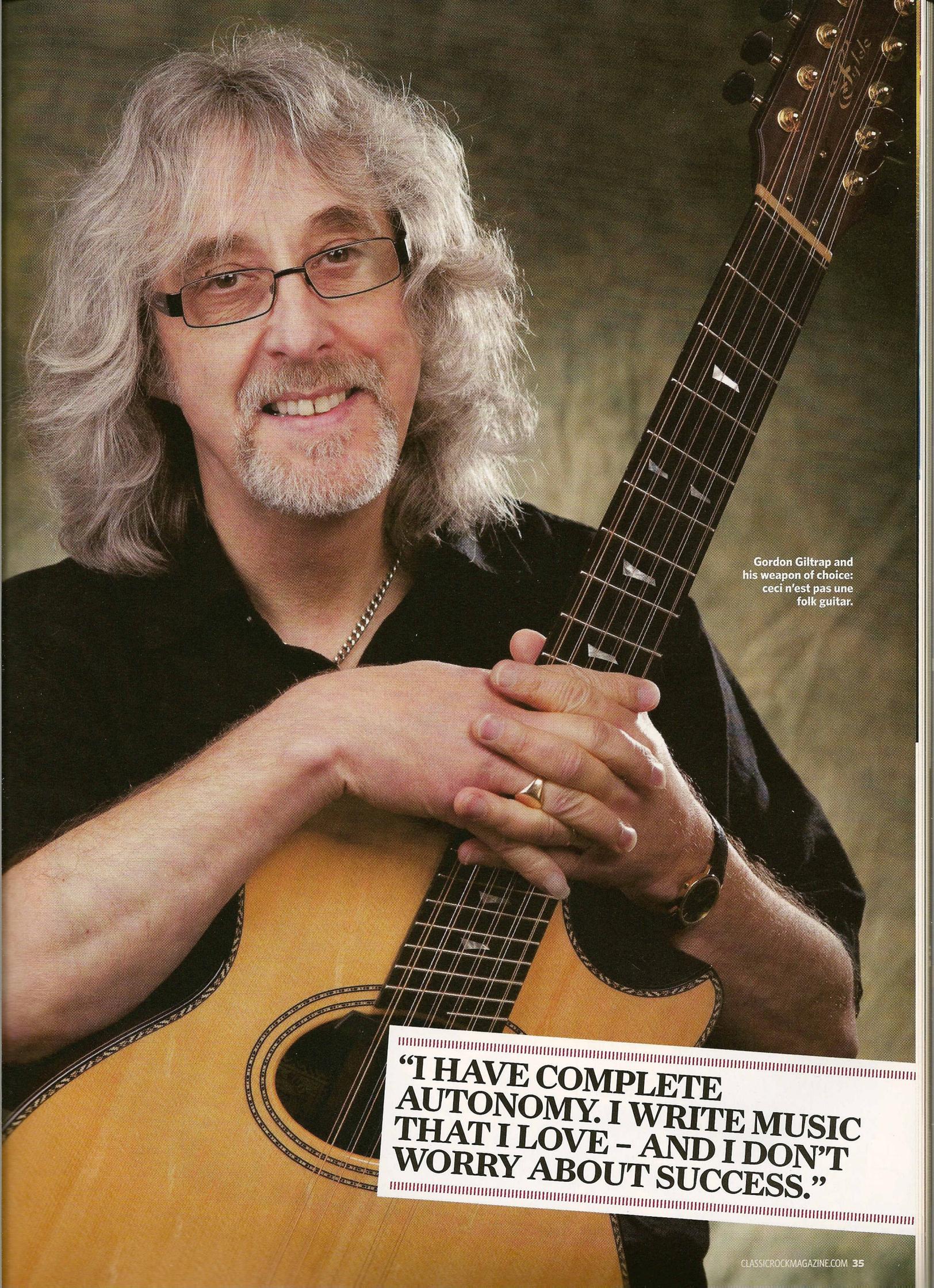
Is it frustrating that you think your most creative time was largely ignored by the mainstream?

Yes there's always that in the background but you do the best that you can at any given time. I've a fairly strong work ethic when it comes to writing and to performance. I've been in the business for 44 years and you do sometimes think 'What do I have to do to get to the next level?' To a degree I've been rebuilding my career since my early prog rock days. The thing I'm pleased about is that you're regarding me as prog rock and not a folk artist. I'm not a folk artist. I don't really know what I am, and I guess people don't know where to put me because I use so many influences. Even on the *Shining Morn* album there's a wide variety. I've had some crappy managers and agents who would just take me on and then after a few months would just drop me, I would find myself without any gigs so it was a struggle.

You had one of the first colour picture discs to be released and yet you were pretty unhappy with the end result?

Oh yes. When you analyse the band, we all looked like pretty macho guys, apart from the singer Shirley Roden, of course. We had Ian Mosley and John Gustafson who was this tough Liverpoolian. So we go along to this photo session and there was a make-up girl there saying we needed to wear make up. We naturally wanted to know why and she told us that because it was a new process, without make-up our images wouldn't be clear when the picture disc came out. And of course the next thing you know, the album came out and we looked like Roxy Music. ♦

Shining Morn is out now on *Floating World*, see www.giltrap.co.uk,



Gordon Giltrap and his weapon of choice: ceci n'est pas une folk guitar.

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