

GILTRAP, HIS SIGNATURE GUITAR AND A SHINY NEW ALBUM

Martin Hudson visited the guitar maestro **Gordon Giltrap** at his home and found his enthusiasm bubbling at more than just a new album

Gordon Giltrap has just released a new album entitled *Shining Morn*, complete with 24-tracks, that yet again allows the listener to marvel at the skill of one of the UK's finest musicians. This album is the latest installment in a career that has spanned forty years, but don't spread the latter bit about.

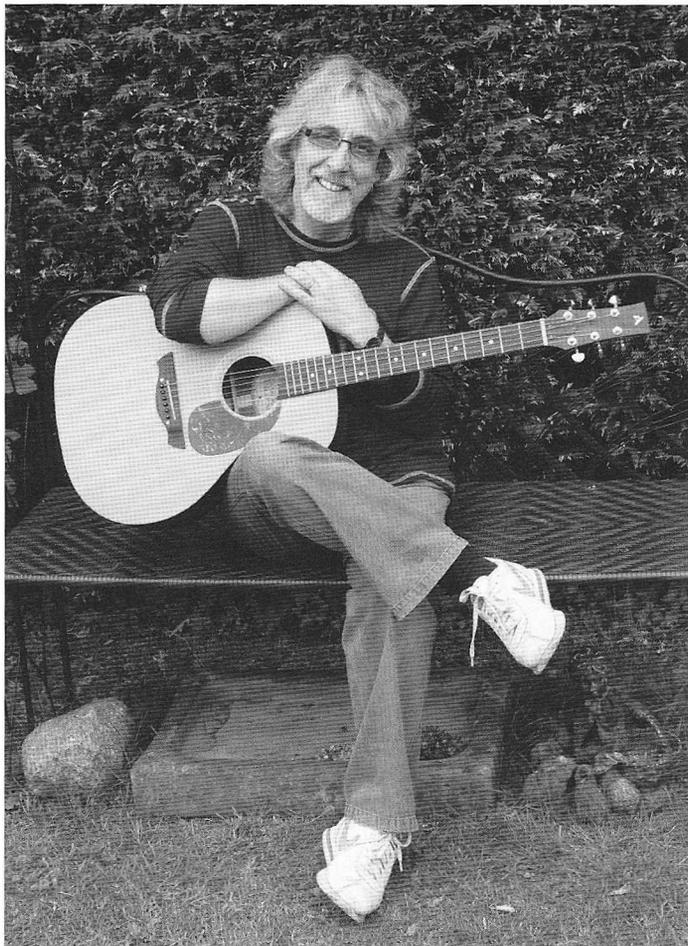
Brian May says of Giltrap, 'Gordon Giltrap is one of an elite few who truly have become legendary.' High praise indeed, but it is not rocket science to agree with May once you have heard just a small portion of the Giltrap repertoire.

He has just completed a nationwide tour of the UK to promote the new album and now the regular columnist for *Acoustic* magazine is thrilled that John Hornby Skewes and Co. Ltd has announced the release of the VE2000GG Gordon Giltrap Signature model guitar in to their award winning Vintage acoustic range. This guitar is designed in conjunction with respected master luthier Rob Armstrong and Gordon himself. It is based on a hand-crafted instrument that Rob made back in 1980 and Gordon plays today.

A luthier, for those that know not, is someone that makes or repairs stringed instruments. The word is taken from the French word for lute (luth).

First though, a visit to Gordon's Midland's home and a chat about that new album and the parts that make a whole. Not all Gordon's music is self-motivated with some being tracks being commissioned and he explained how he responds to such a request.

"I do get asked by some to write a track especially for them and to make it really their own they come up with a title. Most of the time



they come up with something good and they then own the memory. They own the history of the commission. They usually come up with a title that is relevant to my repertoire, like it's my wife's birthday, and our favourite piece of yours is this and we'd like something in a similar vein. They give me a bit of background history and, I don't know, something just happens. More often than not they respond by saying the track is perfect for the subject matter and say, 'I don't know how you do it,' laughed Gordon.

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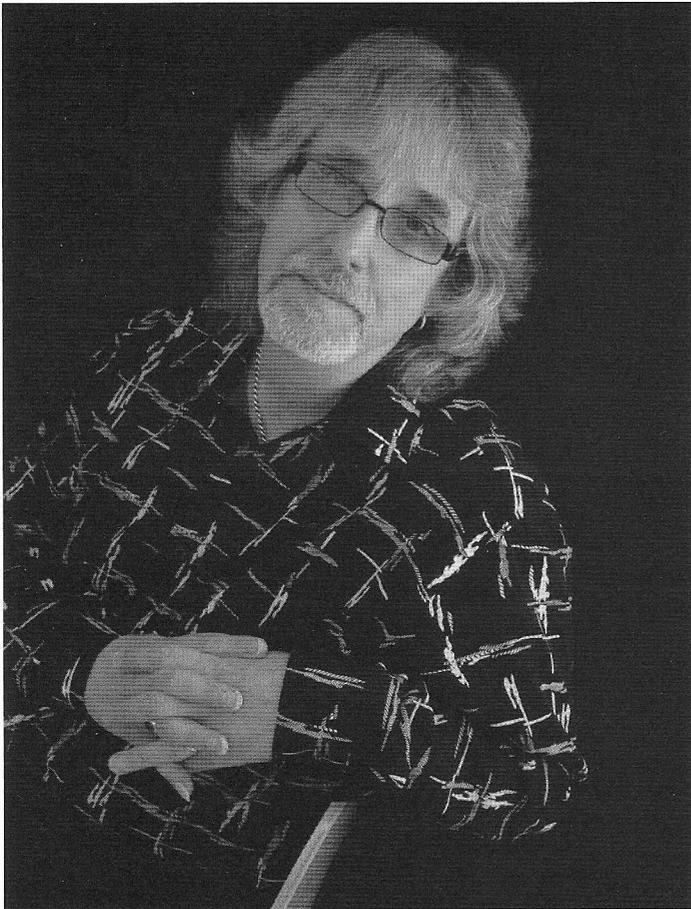
When the track is purely Gordon's idea it begins its life in many ways but he says everything is inspired from the guitar no matter what the subject matter. "It could be a guitar effect, it can be a title. My wife Hilary is great at picking titles. I did an album a few years ago called *Under This Blue Sky*. We were out somewhere and she said, 'Isn't it great to be here under this blue sky.' I said, 'What a great title for an album.' So the title came from that, so it's all sorts of things but normally I come up with the germ of an idea initially. The creative process to me is very straightforward. I never write anything that's dictated by shapes on the fingerboard. I usually try and write something that is dictated by where I think it should go next, so I sing the next bit and then try and play it on the guitar. I suppose many compose in exactly the same way," explained Gordon.

It is generally agreed that Gordon Giltrap's music is relaxing and massages the mind while being absorbing and easy listening. This evolves out of a happy process since Gordon says he cannot write if he is stressed by anything. "There are those that say that they can only write when they're depressed but that is not me, I need calm and balance in my life before I can create. I am not comparing myself with Dylan but he said, 'I've written these songs and I'm now forever a servant to these songs.' They then have a life of their own. A piece only becomes worthy if it touches people. My aim in composing is to communicate and if I don't communicate the piece has failed.

"My watch word has always been melody and I can still remember way back in about 1972 listening to a piece of music and not knowing what it was because I was fairly ignorant towards classical music. It was a piece called *Nimrod* by Edward Elgar from the *Enigma Variations* and to me I thought it was the most fantastic piece of music I'd ever heard. A little light kind of went on in my head," he laughs. "It was a eureka moment and I thought this is what it's all about, this is what I must try and do. The irony is that I was doing that already. If you go back to my first album in 1968 with pieces like *Ive's Horizon*, which appears again on the new album, re-recorded, it's not that much different to the 1965-66 version and that's a fairly melodic piece."

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While he draws much inspiration from baroque and medieval music he even creates while watching TV! *Five Dollar Guitar* came out of watching a documentary on Clapton and the reformation of Cream. He just happened to have a guitar to hand. "Yes, I was sitting on that very seat Martin watching the TV and I had the guitar in my lap, and Clapton was demonstrating the Robert Johnson style of playing and I started to jam along. It was a riff that I wrote and I'd had



around for years and right then I thought I'm going to resurrect that. I stopped playing it because it was hard to play. It's quite impressive when I play it live and I thought I'm going to really get to grips with it and incorporate it in to this. So it's a mixture of that riff I'd had years ago and a riff that I wrote while working with Martin Taylor. It's a real hotchpotch of ideas. It came about through watching Clapton."

It is a fact, Gordon Giltrap sits and watches TV every night with a guitar to hand. "The great thing about having a quiet room and a TV is you can have a guitar to hand and it keeps the fingers working." Be told all you up and coming guitar players! Gordon even admits to once practicing 18-hours a day, "I'd have a break for lunch and a break for tea, it was that intense, but that's many years ago."

Writing mostly on guitar Giltrap is not much of an experimentalist but one track does have some loop station experimenting, something that creates a backing and fuller sound as a song or track is played.

"I've only really used it effectively on the one piece, The Dodo's Dream, and I've re-recorded it for the new album. When I play it now I just think this is a bit of a slow burner because it starts off with a guitar and you can hear it building up, but I wanted to recreate exactly what I do live. People that come along to the concerts often ask, 'Where can I get that, I want to hear what I've heard tonight?' I can now say, 'Well, I've recreated it in a more polished fashion on the new album so that's what you get, you can hear it building up as I do it live. It was tempting on the album to tart it up but I wanted it to be totally honest and I'm very pleased with the album. I've spent a long time on it, it's been at least five-years in the making."

Giltrap has had a couple of chart successes and the fact that audiences regularly request these tracks does not frustrate him. The crowd never has to ask for Heartsong or other favourites such as Lucifer's Cage but if they did Gordon would be happy to play them!

"Unfortunately I haven't had a string of hits like a lot of my pals. I've had two hit singles that I never expected to get anyway and I have the three classic albums, Visionary, Perilous Journey, Fear Of The Dark and maybe Peacock Party, that became sort of a cult album. So if there's a half a dozen pieces out of all the pieces I've written over the past forty-plus-years that people want to hear again I'm going to play them. Heartsong is still a challenge to play because it's high energy, Lucifer's Cage is too. I'm an old guy now, we're all knocking on and so to be able to a) still play the instrument to the standard you want to at the age of sixty-two and b) still be able to make a living out of it is a privilege," said Gordon.

When I pop my clogs I want people to say, 'Yeah, he was alright, he could write a good tune,' and to have a guitar that's going to around long after I've gone and people are going to be playing is a great feeling."

Gordon includes several special guests on Shining Morn, including Rick Wakeman, but it might surprise many (although maybe not CRS readers) as to who he would still like to work with. "I've always wanted to do a Celtic album, I mean a pure Celtic album so one would need the dream band really including people like Troy Donockley, Davy Spillane, Bill Whelan, Kathryn Tickell etc. There are tracks on the new album that are overtly Celtic, like Ring Of Kerry with Karen Tweed. I've also always wanted to do an album with an orchestra. When Rick and I did the Brush and Stone album we'd got five movements from the Brotherhood Suite and that was originally for guitar and string orchestra but that would be a very expensive album."

In conclusion Gordon told me about the other exciting things going on at the moment including the Gordon Giltrap Signature guitar. The prototype was sitting right next to us and can be seen in the photographs on this page. "This has been a dream of mine to actually be involved with a company and to produce a guitar that has got my name associated with it that would be affordable. This guitar sounds fantastic and retails at less than £500, so it will be an affordable instrument. I play guitars that are worth £4,000 to £5,000 and I'm very fortunate and obviously you can't get a guitar that's going to match up to a high end hand made guitar but this ain't far short of it. This is part of my legacy. When I pop my clogs I want people to say, 'Yeah, he was alright, he could write a good tune,' and to have a guitar that's going to be around long after I've gone and people are going to be playing is a great feeling."

That said, the humbled Gordon Giltrap went to put the kettle on. For more information on Gordon, his music and that very special guitar check out his website; www.giltrap.co.uk, or check out the ad inside the back cover of this issue



COMPETITION!

To win one of these fabulous Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature guitars, kindly donated to the CRS by John Hornby Skewes and Co. Ltd, simply answer the following question:

What was the title of Gordon's classic prog rock album that had a black cover with reflective sunglasses?

Please send your answers to the editorial address or email miles@classicrocksociety.co.uk to be in with a chance of winning.

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