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Climax Blues Band Still Crazy After All These Years

“And we talked about some old times, and we drank ourselves some beers,” sings Paul Simon on his timeless classic, words that certainly ring true with many a veteran musician still plying their trade north and south, through thick, thin, difficult times and global pandemics. Austin Powell settles down for a pint and a chinwag with his old mucker, George Glover of Climax Blues Band.

“We were short of a guitarist...” George Glover is remembering the days when he was in a pop group in Stoke-On-Trent called Colour Supplement. “There was a blues club at the Crown and Anchor in Longton and we went to check out Pete Haycock. Somebody had suggested him to us. He’d be fifteen or sixteen years of age at the time, but it turned out he wasn’t interested.”

Fast forward fifty five years and George is now the longest serving member in Climax Blues Band, the band that Haycock and Colin Cooper formed in 1967 - how different things might have been if Pete Haycock had joined Colour Supplement. Climax Chicago Blues Band, as they were first known, came along at much the same time as Fleetwood Mac, Chicken Shack, Ten Years After and Free. Their first album was a mix of American blues and original songs, the former being standard fayre by Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Boy Williamson, Howlin’ Wolf and Big Joe Turner. It’s still an album worth having in your collection. Over the years Climax rang lots of changes as far as their material was concerned; the band’s only U.K. hit was the very ‘pop’ ‘Couldn’t Get It Right’ in 1976. That song made number 3 in America and four years later they scored again over there with Derek Holt’s soft rock ballad ‘I Love You’.

Like many outfits, over the years Climax has had many comings and goings where members are concerned and George Glover’s arrival in the band in 1981 was the result of his being in The Cyril Dagworth Players, another Stoke band and one that included Des (David) Parton, famous for his Stevie Wonder cover, ‘Isn’t She Lovely’. George remembers how he came to join Climax. “We [The Dagworths] did a gig, I think it might have been at the Victoria Hall in Stoke supporting Climax and their manager Miles Copeland loved The Dagworths – he

was interested in us and asked about management and took us into CBS Records where we made a demo album of songs [still unreleased], but because of Parton’s Tony Hatch and Pye tie-in the whole thing fizzled out.” It proved impossible to consummate a deal that satisfied all parties and Copeland was not a man given to chasing a rainbow he couldn’t capture. “I liked him,” says George, “he was really hard, straight to the point – I liked that in him.”

In the meantime the Copeland-managed Climax Blues Band had been clocking up the miles touring America, after which the keyboard player Peter Filleul decided to leave the band. “Next thing, I get a phone call asking if I’ve like to audition for the job,” says George. “I went along, but I felt a little bit out of my depth. I didn’t know all that kind of bluesy, jazzy stuff, but I got the job.” It turned out that George’s first gig with Climax was something of a baptism by fire. “The first gig was a live TV show in Germany, going out to a million people, I don’t know, something ridiculous. Rory Gallagher was on the show, Steve Gibbons was too, but it went well and the next thing I knew I was on a two and a half month tour across Europe and the Far East.”

So forty years on and with the life of the band now something over fifty three years since the first album, there’s a lot of repertoire for the band to choose from when compiling a set list. Do some of the early songs still figure in the mix? “Yes, we do... just before we released *Hands of Time*, we released *The Official Bootleg Album* which was the current line-up playing a lot of the earlier material, things like ‘Last Chance Saloon’ which is requested at more or less every gig and it’s a bit of a strange thing really because some of the band now want to stick playing the new stuff where I’m still really addicted to a lot of the old stuff. I



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The digital age has meant there's a multitude of Climax albums available to buyers on the internet as well as the two Esoteric label box sets that collated the band's albums issued between 1969 and 1976. Watching over this abundance of music must take some doing, but George has a different view about it all. "Streaming and downloading hardly scratches the surface as far as the early stuff goes – it's just the two big records ['Couldn't Get It Right' and 'I Love You']. Oddly enough *Hands of Time* is now up there with those two which is fabulous for me." In fact fabulous for the entire band as they all share the writers' royalties on the album. George compares *Hands of Time* to *Flying The Flag*, the band's bestselling album. "If you listen to *Flying The Flag*, it's mostly pop songs." The first Climax album that George played on was *Sample And Hold* which was just him, Cooper and Haycock backed up with session musicians; the only album the band made for Virgin Records. He still says Pete Haycock was "one of the best guitarists I ever played with."

The two year Covid hiatus found him reading, "something", he says, "I hadn't done much before. I got to love being on my own, walking in woods and things. I had to change my lifestyle completely. About half way through it all, I started to panic a little bit about losing mobility in my hands so I started playing just for the exercise. I'd go upstairs, stick a pair of headphones on and just play and enjoy it." He still finds playing live a real buzz. "I love it," is the simple answer to my question about being 'on the road' and after a few gigs here in Britain, November saw the band back in Germany and Austria for sixteen days. Back in the sixties when his first group, Colour Supplement, played in Germany, Sweden and Denmark, to take instruments and equipment into Europe meant itemizing everything and filling in carnets, temporary import documents. The system was time consuming and often the source of aggravation if

customs officers found things in the van that weren't on the list correctly. Britain joining the EU made that a thing of the past; we're out now, so what happens now? The answer is a simple one it seems: "It's cheaper now for us to have the agency we're working with provide the back line. We'd prefer to have our own, but it's just too expensive."

Talking of doing things differently, next March sees Climax doing a cruise gig, the *Rock And Romance Cruise* which is a weeklong trip from Miami and back via the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands. "It's another thing that came about because of the *Hands Of Time* album, even though it hasn't been released over there." They'll be playing alongside The Hollies, Rick Wakeman, Foghat, Robert Hart (Bad Company), Don Felder (The Eagles) and others on a diverse list of artists and, barely concealing his mirth, he comments "and the line-up keeps getting stranger and weirder and weirder, but the money is better than gigging!"

Like many people of George's age and experience, much of today's music holds no great appeal. He thinks "the standard of songwriting is nowhere as good as it used to be", though admits that "might be an age thing." That said, he waxes lyrical about Canadian band, The Brothers Landreth. "They've done a few gigs here and they've got one of the best voices and guitar players I've heard in a long time. They write great songs and have great vocals. They sell-out wherever they play, whatever country they travel to, but they're only playing small clubs."

Things might have changed in so many ways, but for Climax Blues Band the future holds more of the same, playing the blues in the creative way that has always been synonymous with their name: always ready to gig and working towards a new album for 2023.

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