

Ian Hunter

Rocker, balladeer, author and “Classic Songwriter” Award-winner, Ian Hunter has a diamond-studded and matchless repertoire.

Ian Hunter was one of the most inventive rock writers of the early '70s paving the way for the decade's "New Wave" with his thought-provoking, honest and gritty songs. As a solo performer he has also succeeded with an impressive catalogue of superb albums and a dedicated following.

Ian's musical passion was first ignited by Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis and he appeared in various early bands, mainly as a bass player backing Billy Fury and Freddie 'Fingers' Lee. Ian also worked as a provincial journalist and later a staff songwriter in Denmark Street at the musical heart of Sixties London.

In 1969, Ian Hunter Patterson auditioned for a group named Silence that had morphed from several 60s Herefordshire bands including The Buddies, The Shakedown Sound and The Doc Thomas Group. The audition was supervised by Guy Stevens, a manic 'producer', 'A&R man' and visionary from a vibrant and progressive label called Island Records. Stevens was a burning flame, a catalyst and a passionate instigator with a profound propensity for generating and procuring names. He changed Silence to Savage Rose and Fixable then swiftly re-christened the band Mott the Hoople, after the title of a book by American author Willard Manus. Guy's other identities for new groups included Procol Harum and The Heavy Metal Kids and he also 'devised' titles such as *Sticky Fingers*, 'Death May Be Your Santa Claus', AC/DC and 'The Wheel of the Quivering Meat Conception' for Hoople albums and songs - some of them lifted from strange and obscure sources.

Ian was invited to join Mott with none of them realising at the time that the singer-songwriter would soon become their most valuable asset. Guy was the band's inspirational mentor and was crucial to their development for without him Mott would never have existed. Stevens' 'vision' was a band that combined the primal power of the Rolling Stones with the cool lyrical prowess of Bob Dylan. Razor-thin, balding and bearded, Guy ran on high octane and in a recording studio was the sworn-enemy of moveable furniture.

Mott the Hoople recorded four albums for Island Records between 1969 and 1971. Their debut *Mott the Hoople* reached #66 in the UK charts and was heavily Dylan-influenced under Stevens' direction while *Mad Shadows* (UK #48) was a darker affair with Hunter's writing prominent. *Wildlife* (UK #44) had a gentler atmosphere as exemplified by Ian's beautiful composition 'Waterlow' but Mott also aimed for singles chart success recording 'Midnight Lady' with renowned American producer Shadow Morton. The astonishing punk-primer, *Brain Capers* became the band's Island swansong and they went down blazing - literally - taping the album with Guy in only five days and trashing and burning Basing Street Studios in the process. 'The Moon Upstairs'

was one of the resultant tracks, a song covered by The Dictators which gave credence to the godfathers-of-punk claim subsequently levelled at Mott.

Ian Hunter had rapidly become a writer of considerable merit with songs such as 'Backsliding Fearlessly', 'Half Moon Boy', 'Walking With a Mountain', 'I Can Feel', 'Angel of Eighth Avenue' and 'The Journey', often encouraging the band to break new ground. Mott was also a significant concert draw and a dynamic powerful unit watched and admired by Slade, Status Quo and King Crimson's Robert Fripp. Led by the inspiring and communicative Hunter, Mott generated a fervent live following and was responsible for a ban on rock concerts at London's Royal Albert Hall after "damage" was caused by the "riotous behaviour" of their audience. Inexplicably, however, they could not convert this euphoria into record sales - so Mott split!

In the nick of time, soon-to-be superstar David Bowie, who was a secret Hoople admirer, offered them one of his finest songs, 'All the Young Dudes' re-uniting the group and giving them another shot at greatness. 'Dudes' became one of 1972's biggest and most distinctive singles, reaching #3 in the UK charts and propelling Mott towards mainstream success. Sell out tours were soon punctuated with a string of Hunter-penned hit singles including 'Honoloochie Boogie', 'All the Way from Memphis' and 'Roll Away the Stone'. The critically acclaimed *Mott* album, arranged by Ian, hit #7 in the UK charts and is still regarded as a 70s classic that charmingly chronicled the trials, tribulations, inspirations and desperation of rock and roll. 'The Ballad of Mott the Hoople (26th March 1972, Zurich)' and 'Hymn for the Dudes' were two of Hunter's finest autobiographical songs and the proto-punk 'Violence' successfully retained the anger of the group's earlier work.

Ian had become Mott's undisputed leader and as their virtual sole songwriter he composed some fearsome and percipient songs including a frantic operetta, 'Marionette' and 'Crash Street Kidds' for the band's final studio album. *The Hoople* (UK #11) was another huge chart success as Hunter blazed across the front pages of the world's music press and Mott's popularity soared. The image of the band had become iconic with Ian's mysterious shades and identifiable corkscrew hair to say nothing of their "flash-rock" attire and penchant for spectacular guitars, notably Hunter's infamous 'Maltese Cross'. In May 1974 Mott was the first rock band ever to sell out a week of Broadway concerts in New York's theatre-land and Ian's book *Diary of a Rock 'n' Roll Star* was universally acclaimed. It was a peak period for the group.

Various personnel changes in the Hoople camp ended with Bowie's former guitarist, the legendary Mick Ronson joining the band and he played on the self-referential single 'Saturday Gigs'. However, this turned out to be Mott's epitaph when all the pressures on Hunter as figurehead led to his hospitalization in America. In spite of pleadings and persuasions from their original guiding light Guy Stevens, Ian quit the group and by December 1974 Mott the Hoople ceased to exist.

Hunter launched a solo career in 1975 and went on to deliver many highly acclaimed albums including *Ian Hunter* (UK #21), *All-American Alien Boy* (UK

#29), *You're Never Alone with a Schizophrenic* (US #35) and *Welcome to the Club* (US #35). More classic songs abounded including 'Once Bitten Twice Shy', 'Boy', 'You Nearly Did Me In', 'Cleveland Rocks' and 'Standing in my Light' and some of Ian's records were bravely eclectic, such as *Short Back 'N' Sides*, produced by Mick Jones of The Clash.

The *Ian Hunter* album remains a jewel that far exceeded post-Hoople expectations with Mick Ronson's sparkling and inventive guitar-work adding latent energy to some of Ian's finest compositions. For many fans, *You're Never Alone with a Schizophrenic*, cut with Ronson and Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band remains a timeless masterpiece and Hunter's finest hour. By 1980, Ian and Mick were still cutting it big time, as exemplified by *Welcome to the Club*, a full-blooded live collection that mixed Mott and solo classics with aplomb and applied interesting twists to older songs like 'Laugh at Me' and 'The Golden Age of Rock 'n' Roll.' The album truly captured the explosive energy of Hunter Ronson and their brilliant connection with the L.A. Roxy audience.

Ian and Mick occasionally pooled their skills for successful production projects including *Generation X* and *Ellen Foley* but by the mid '80s Hunter's output was limited to songs for selected movie soundtracks including *Teachers* and *Fright Night*. He resumed his partnership with Ronson in the late 80s and recorded the album *YUI Orta* as 'Hunter Ronson' but in April 1993, tragedy struck when Mick died at the age of 46 following a valiant 18-month battle against cancer. Ian headlined at two Mick Ronson Memorial Concerts and wrote a heart-wrenching tribute to the Spider with the platinum hair, 'Michael Picasso'.

Ronson's passing re-awakened Ian and generated renewed vigour in his writing and he upped-the-ante with *The Artful Dodger* (1997) and *Rant* (2001), crafting some of his finest songs including 'Dead Man Walking' and 'Death of a Nation'. In 2001 Ian also joined Ringo Starr and his All-Starr Band for US live dates and the following year Hunter played two breath-taking concerts in Oslo accompanied by a 17-piece string section, The Trondheim Soloists. The resultant CD and DVD, *Strings Attached* contained several surprises, not least 'Don't Let Go', two new songs 'Rollerball' and 'Twisted Steel' (inspired by New York's 9/11 terrorist attack) and one cover - the Forties romantic British popular song - 'A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square'. Fittingly, in 2005, Hunter was rewarded for his considerable contributions to music with *Classic Rock's* inaugural 'Classic Songwriter Award' presented by Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera at a ceremony in London.

Ian's next studio project *Shrunken Heads* received universal praise with one reviewer describing it as Hunter's best album in 23 years and perhaps the most unexpectedly wonderful record of the year. 'Reed 'Em 'N' Weep' easily sat beside 'I Wish I Was Your Mother' and 'Irene Wilde' as one of Ian's greatest ballads and *Shrunken Heads* was placed at #5 in *Classic Rock's* Top 50 albums of 2007 chart. The record featured a cast of stellar musicians including drummer Steve Holley and guitarist James Mastro who both appeared with Ian on a stunning 2008 UK Acoustic Tour.

Hunter released *Man Overboard* in 2009, another remarkable album that successfully mixed humour, life and literacy, all trademarks of Ian's work that we have grown to expect and love. His songs seemed even wiser and more open than usual with *The Sunday Times* opining that "Hunter is as sharp and cussed as ever!" *Man Overboard* was placed at #20 in *Classic Rock's* 2009 Top 50 albums chart and received a Five Star review and "New Album of the Year" accolade from *Record Collector*.

After rumour and counter-rumour and against all the odds, in October 2009, Ian and the original members of Mott the Hoople played five nights at London's Hammersmith Odeon, the scene of the band's 1973 swashbuckling *Mott the Hoople Live* album and another legendary crowd riot! Described as one of the most rapturously received re-union gigs in recent memory, Young Dudes, Old Dudes, Sea Divers and Hot Motts were ecstatic as the band celebrated their 40th Anniversary. Mott the Hoople also received a 2009 Mojo Hall of Fame Award.

Ian played a further UK tour in 2010 including a concert filmed at London's Union Chapel and in 2011 he is writing once more in anticipation of his twentieth studio album both as Mott-man and solo artist. With the astonishing trilogy of *Rant*, *Shrunken Heads* and *Man Overboard*, Hunter has proved that he is probably on the hottest song writing streak of his illustrious career.

Ian Hunter was the musical and lyrical powerhouse in Mott the Hoople, one of rock's most valuable groups. He subsequently rejected lucrative offers to reform the band and resisted posts with Uriah Heep and The Doors as he carved out an enviable solo repertoire. He has been cited as a major inspiration for numerous artists including The Clash, Def Leppard, Kiss, R.E.M., Oasis, Motley Crue, Blur and Primal Scream. His musical influence remains immeasurable with over 150 different cover versions of songs from his astonishing archive and he has worked with many musical legends including Queen, David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band, John Cale, Mick Ronson, David Sanborn and Ringo Starr.

Hunter's work contains some of the most intelligent lyrics ever penned in rock and roll and he remains a priceless figure on the musical landscape. *Classic Rock's* 'Classic Songwriter Award' and his recent albums and performances are testament to Ian Hunter's importance and relentless artistic quality.

Campbell Devine

Author of *All the Young Dudes - Mott the Hoople and Ian Hunter - The Official Biography*

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