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Party Day_ - Interview

by [Dave Goodwin](#)

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intro

For those who missed them the first time around Party Day, formerly called Further Experiments, were an English indie rock, some say goth-ish band formed in 1981 in Wombwell near Barnsley, originally a four-piece outfit consisting of guitarists Martin Steele and Greg Firth, bassist Carl Firth and drummer, Mick Baker. Releasing their first single, 'Row the Boat Ashore / Poison' on their own Party Day Records in 1983, it was their next release, 'The Spider', which gained more attention and was played on John Peel's BBC Radio 1 show, with their debut album 'Glasshouse'(1985) also gaining rave reviews.

They released their next full offering, 'Simplicity', in 1986 and shortly after came arguably their finest hour, the single 'Rabbit Pie' which was featured on the compilation LP 'Giraffe in Flames'. They had to change their line-up due to Martin leaving due to ill-health with other members coming in. Sadly, by 1988 they had broken up, shortly before finishing their third album.

Since then, interest has never waned and they were included in Mick Mercer's book 'Gothic Rock: All you ever wanted to know but were too afraid to ask' and the track 'Atoms' has been included on a number of compilation albums such as 'Strobelight

Dave Goodwin speaks to Mick Baker and Carl Firth from 80's indie/goth band Party Day about their history and new compilation, 'Sorted!'

favourite album

Sorted (2021)

Records - Volume 3'. 2021 saw the 40th Anniversary of the band's beginnings, culminating with the latest album 'Sorted!', a comprehensive collection of all their recordings plus demos which we reviewed last time out here in this very magazine. We got the chance to speak to Mick Baker and Carl Firth from the band and chat about the past, present and even the future of Party Day, and it went something like this;

PB: I said in my review of 'Sorted!' that I had missed out on most of your output due to other stuff going on in my life back then so it's almost as if I have discovered Party Day all over again and the findings are incredible because I just love the sound of Party Day! How does that make you feel now - that you can have that sort of reaction to your music all these years on?

MICK: It's fantastic that folk think the music still sounds good after all these years! We all used to listen to lots of different bands and styles/genres of music to try and formulate our own sound. It's amazing when we think back to the recording process and how limited our options were. I suppose that helped us get on with it and make the most of our limited studio time! We made sure we were well rehearsed and ready to deliver in the studio. Our manager Steve's plan was to record the tracks as demos in the hope that a major label would sign us and then we would record in a "BIG" studio!

The demos turned out sounding good enough to release, so it was decided that we would release the tracks ourselves on our own indie label.

CARL: It's a strange feeling to be honest, strange but very uplifting. From my perspective, I was always excited to write and play in a band and got a huge buzz from putting together something coherent. It was a great feeling when simple jamming suddenly turned into something like a recognisable tune. We never wrote down any kind of music, everything came from experimentation, trial and error. You couldn't be too self-critical as there wasn't time or resources to 'perfect' things, practise and studio time were at a premium, we often trialled new songs out during gigs. As long as we were happy with the outcome, I was happy, regardless of wider opinion. So then, after consigning all our songs to the jukebox of history, I feel extremely pleased and somewhat humbled that their re-release has generated so much interest and kind comments from a far wider audience than I ever expected. I always felt that our music is very reflective of the '80s but also a certain freshness remains in many of the songs, and they do not sound out of place in amongst today's playlists.

PB: What was the catalyst for releasing 'Sorted!'?

MICK: Steve made the Party Day website (1999) to create a story/history of the band (and also as a foray into webpage design!). He did a lot of band photography back then and I think Ian at Optic Nerve Recordings contacted Steve about material for another band that Optic was releasing. This then led to the conversation about Party Day, which then led to the request from Ian to release Party Day's back catalogue! (CHEERS STEVE!!) That was back in 2015. We started the ball rolling in late 2015 and then Dean suddenly passed away. This totally derailed the project back then. I had a very quiet time (work and music-wise) during the pandemic, so I decided to get everything together if Ian was still on board. Steve, along with Ian, helped with suggestions and proofing of the artwork. That was between Christmas and February last year. It was penned for release in June last year but with everything happening in the world.....!! The vinyl is only just being released now and Ian tells me it's selling fast with a repress looking likely as well! It's in the shops 28th January. The CD was released in October and has sold out. A repress has been ordered! It's also available as digital downloads.

CARL: Mick has described this perfectly. Massive thanks to Steve D for keeping the flag flying and being the catalyst for dealings with Optic Nerve Records, who also have my huge thanks.

PARTY DAY



SORTED!

In our 'Re:View' column, in which we look back at records from the past. Dave Goodwin reflects on a new double CD compilation from early 80's Barnsley post-punk band Party Day

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PB: What happened? Why did Party Day split? What have you all been up to since?

MICK: How long have you got?! Just a quick history lesson!

Martin temporarily left in June 84 due to ill health, so Dean stood in on guitar. Steve left as manager after Martin's illness. Martin decided he didn't wish to continue and left February 85. The 'Glasshouse' LP was finished as a two-piece in the studio. Dean joined as a permanent member Spring 85. Carl wasn't enjoying the whole thing and left the band after 'Simplicity' was released in 86. Most of the momentum of the early days had been lost, especially with the loss of Steve's direction and motivation. Dean recruited long-time friend Paul Nash (The Danse Society) for production duties, but he ended up as the lead guitarist as well! Shaun Crowcroft joined on bass. After recording a third, unreleased album in 1987, we decided to call it a day in Spring 88.

Since then, I am an adopted Mancunian having lived here since 1990. I have been working in studios and have been in various bands, but none achieving the levels that Party Day reached. I'm back playing again now the kids are grown up and have left home for college.

Martin has suffered with mental health problems.

Carl had a few musical endeavours back in the day soon after he left, I'll ask him! He runs a successful clothing/screen printing business, so if you want some top quality T-Shirts/merchandise!!

Sadly, Dean passed away New Year 2016, his wife had told me he'd done a few things musical, but his passion was teaching at the Brit Academy in London.

Paul is back out touring The Danse Society and releasing new material.

Shaun still lives in Barnsley (I think) but not sure what he is up to.

Greg is playing bass with the Black Lamps of Barnsley.

CARL: Mick describes things well again. After the sad withdrawal from the band by Martin I was initially excited by Dean joining. He was a good friend and really helped by filling in while we waited to see if Martin would recover from his mental health problems. When he joined full-time, it was exciting as we had a new sound, and my enthusiasm was boosted by this. I still to this day can't put my finger on the exact reason why my interest started to wane, but I do remember always thinking, that while we were practising or playing gigs, 'I wonder what Martin might think to this song, this chord change, this lyric...' I think I was very young and impressionable and took these thoughts too seriously which slowly dragged at my enjoyment to the point where I felt it time for a change. I think I always regret this decision, as looking back we could have pushed on, but I felt the band might have a better chance with some fresh impetus.

After leaving Party Day I re-joined my brother, Greg, an original member of the first Party Day line up, and we formed a bedroom band called Pastry Dave and the Obvious Wigs. I swapped bass for guitar and Greg moved from guitar to bass. Pastry Dave was, in fact, a 'new-fangled' Dr Rhythm drum machine, who knows why we gave it that moniker? We did a few gigs locally and it was during these gigs that I soon realised that having to operate 'Dave' barefoot with my big toe was not a cool and sustainable way forward. So, we enlisted a duo from the recently split Silent Scream, Dean Ormston on drums and Liam Stewart on guitar. As the brand-new band called BIFF, we recorded several songs, did quite a few gigs and had a great response, but it was never really taken that seriously and after about a year or so lost momentum. Watch this space as we intend to make available on Spotify, etc the songs we recorded.

After Biff I started to concentrate on the clothing business, I am still co-owner now,

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and briefly taking up a bass guitar position in a good local band called Detail Fiend. My band days were over after this point. Liam, Dean and Greg are still treading the proverbial boards with their excellent band, The Black Lamps.

PB: Your music sounds like a lot of the bands of that time (a time I was growing up), but you also had at the same time a unique sound. Who were your main influences and did they change much in the time you were together?

MICK: We had a wide range of influences from the onset! Greg and Martin are 3 or 4 years older than Carl and I, so they had a more extended musical palette. I was brought up on a fairly strict diet of punk from the age of 13. Martin and I were into punk and rock, the Pistols/Clash/Motorhead, etc but listened to dub, reggae/ska as well. Greg and Carl were more into The Jam, Skids, and more of the power pop stuff. There was common ground between us and we'd listen to anything really.

Martin and I wanted the more punk/rock direction whereas the Firths wanted the power pop/alternative stance! We did split very early on when we were transitioning from "Further Experiments" to "Party Day" over the direction of the band, but we reconciled and reformed the band after a couple of months apart. It was a great time because everything was happening around the late 70s, early 80s. We'd had the punk explosion, mod/ska revival, post punk, electronic/synth music.....it was all happening!

CARL: As the 'baby' of the band, joining at the age of 14, I guess I was heavily influenced by the older members, so yes...The Jam, Skids, Joy Division, etc, however I had a few of my own other favourites like Joe Jackson, Japan, Elvis Costello, Stranglers. What was consistent in my liking for these bands was how a good bass player can be a driving force for them. I wanted to be Jean-Jacques Burnell. So, when I got the chance to practise and play bass and join a cool band there was no stopping me. After meeting Mick and realising how good a drummer he was I soon started to try and make my bass as much a driving force as he was with the sticks. I like to think that is what influenced our style rather than specific bands.

PB: Did you ever fall out? There must be a funny incident you could share with us from all the gigging.

MICK: I wouldn't say fall out! We had our differences but accepted them and got on with it. We'd have a moan at (poor) Steve, if there were no turn-out at the gigs or the PA/monitors were shit. Martin was a bit of a prankster, usually Carl being on the end of the pranks, but all in good humour. We'd take the piss out of Steve if something didn't go to plan, but he usually had the last laugh as it would be us affected – not him!!

CARL: I look back and remember many moments, but I would probably say that at the time I was more astonished than amused. For example, the gig where Martin, backstage and out of the blue, refused to sing and said that I should start singing from now on. We played a song where he would normally come in with the vocals but, of course, he didn't. Mick and I continued the intro to the song over and over as though it was intentional, thinking at some point that Martin would break and start singing. He didn't! Eventually I thought, 'Shit I'm going to have to sing, or this could go on all night' so I did. The song burst into life, and I remember the audience thinking it was great. After that, almost all the singing suddenly became my responsibility.

There was another time when we were supporting The Cult in Leeds. In our first song I broke my second bass string. Being the consummate professional that I was I had obviously not got a spare bass or even a spare set of strings (times were hard!!). I turned to the main act's bass player, who was stood at the side of the stage, and gestured as if to say, 'lend us your bass mate!' ...zero response! I had to play the entire set with three strings. To make it worse, Martin, in his inimitable style announced to the audience that the next song was our newly released single, 'The Spider', and duly decided to take the black vinyl out of the cover and throw it,

Frisbee-style, into the audience. I watched in horror as it disappeared like a Bond villain’s bowler hat into the blackness of the audience. After the three-string debacle and the prospective beheading of an audience member I thought to myself ‘Jesus, we are going to get annihilated here, and probably beat up by a furious guy with a record lodged in his skull’. So, imagine my relief when a grinning, over-excited individual approached us after the gig saying ‘I got the single lads, can I have the sleeve. That was one of the best gigs I’ve ever seen’. No-one even noticed I had only got three strings.

PB: I know that the live set was a big part of what you did. Do you miss touring and do you have any thoughts of reforming?

MICK: Yeah, I love playing live, nothing beats the “buzz”, the excitement! Carl said recently, he’d picked up the bass after 30 years off! I think it would be difficult to reform the band without Martin or Dean but who knows, with time passing we know a lot of good musicians between us. If not, there may be an acoustic Party Day, with Carl on ukulele and myself on spoons!

A fair few songs never got recorded, or not to the standard of being good enough to release, early on in Party Day. There’d probably be an album’s worth. That would be a nice studio project for Carl and me to dowatch this space!

CARL: I loved the buzz of the live gig, even the gigs where very few people turned up. I always wanted to put everything into a set as though we were playing Reading Festival. It didn’t matter if there were only thirty people in the audience. These days it seems to be the opposite way round for bands, build your audience through social media then start gigging. We had to gig for our lives so that someone might notice us. Looking back, I think they did more than I realised.

As for reforming, as Mick suggests it might be difficult to reform but not out of the realms of possibility. We do indeed know some good musicians. Also, after singing along to the CD of ‘Sorted!’ for the last few weeks, played at full volume in my beloved Transporter, I’m starting to think ‘bollocks to it, just do it’. I might just get the Pledge out and dust off the bass guitar that’s been staring at me from the corner of my room for too long now.

PB: When exactly is the vinyl option in stock again? I need to add to my collection...

MICK: The vinyl has finally landed! (at Optic Nerve). You can order direct from them or it will be available in record shops from 28th January 2022.

We at Pennyblackmusic would like to thank Mick and Carl for their honest and candid approach in this chat and would like to wish them a wonderful future in everything that they do.

Band Links:-

<http://www.party-day.co.uk/>
<https://www.facebook.com/party.day.uk/>

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The Spider



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PARTY DAY



SORTED!

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