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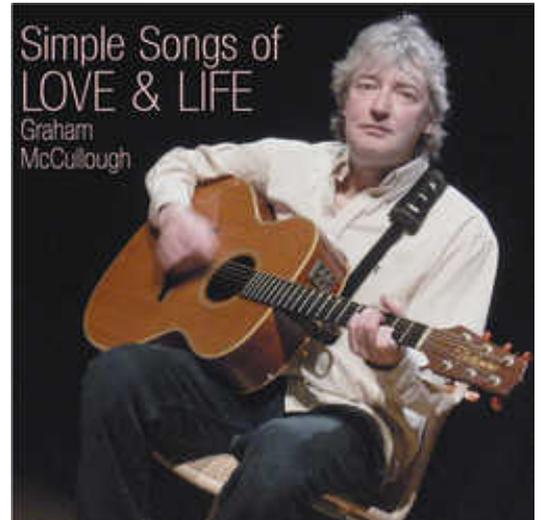
Acoustic Originals Open Mic Nights leads to a record deal for local songwriter Graham McCullough!

“Without Quay Arts’ Acoustic Originals nights it would never have happened!”

John Waterman, MD, Solent Records.

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Quay Arts Centre, Newport, Isle of Wight have been running the popular Acoustic Originals since May 2008 and within the space of a year it has provided a platform for budding songwriters / musicians to showcase their talent. Graham McCullough’s first performance on Jul 16 last year has catapulted him onto the road to stardom with the launch of his first album later this month.

Graham McCullough, 48 year-old local songwriter from Ryde is a '60's wild child who started out with a fascination of the world of popular music, listening to Radio Luxembourg and landing a job in a guitar shop at fifteen demonstrating guitars for a living – not a bad place for an aspiring rock god!

He returned to college a year later to ‘do something with his life’ and five years later he had gained a degree in Economics. This life experience coupled with his ongoing love affair of music opened doors and landed him a job with the BBC as a Graphic Assistant in 1984 where he entered the world of live television graphics.

Whilst in his 12th year at the BBC he was offered the position of the Head of the Graphic Design section in the BBC's News & Current Affairs department which led to several accolades and a succession of awards, international recognition, Bafta's, Broadcast Design Association gongs and Royal Television Society awards enjoyed by his department. After 18 years, Graham found his enjoyment of the job had changed and that the fun had gone out of it! The question of ‘what next’ was answered with ‘*I know I'll become that pop star that I always wanted to be...*’

In 2003, Graham dusted down his trusty guitar and began taking it along to a few 'Open Mic' nights at little pubs in and around London playing covers songs by people such as John Otway, Loudon Wainwright III, or occasionally Led Zeppelin until the organisers asked why he didn't play his own songs? He wrote his first song on the train homeward bound to the Isle of Wight from work. Graham nervously performed his first two songs written in the intervening week to an appreciative audience a week later.

“You could hear a pin drop! Afterwards a number of people came up to me and said ‘I know where you are coming from’ so the songs resonated with quite a few people,” Graham McCullough.

On the Island, Graham found **Quay Arts’ Acoustic Originals** to be the only space to perform where there was ‘*a nice mix of different abilities and where it’s not too noisy which can be off-putting to fledgling songwriters.*’

'Acoustic Originals is a good place to get feedback from other musicians and Mick (Smith) is really good at getting the audience to enjoy a chat between songs but then to give the musician respect and listen whilst they play which gives less confident people the chance to come to the fore. Acoustic Originals was a very good vehicle for me to continue writing and to try out new songs. Pubs on the Island prefer it if you play covers so don't usually tolerate your own stuff and my music tends to be a too quiet for a Saturday night anyway.' Graham McCullough.

Graham sold his first 3 track CD at Acoustic Originals to John Waterman, MD of Solent Records for a mere £3. A week later, John contacted Graham and he commenced work on his first album working with fellow musician and friend, Bob Brace. Graham also met Jamie Griffin at Acoustic Originals where he offered to engineer this album at his newly built, Brighstone home studio.

John Waterman of Solent Records and album publisher describes this album:

"Here are songs you will grow to love and play often in the future. Graham's direct, intimate and laid back style coupled with mostly sparse, largely acoustic, arrangements bring the emotions and bumps of real life into focus. Most tracks feature the talents of Bob Brace on piano or violin. Here you'll find the love, rejection, rebirth, depression, temptation, satisfaction, happiness and fulfillment most of us experience as we progress through our lives."

And John Waterman added:

"Without Quay Arts Acoustic Originals nights it would never have happened!"

Graham McCullough and his band, featuring piano and violin virtuoso Bob Brace, launched his new Solent Records album 'Simple Songs of Love and Life' at a charity concert at Medina Theatre Newport on June 21st at 7.30pm.

The concert was in aid of the Earl Mountbatten Hospice.

Graham played the album twice at the IW festival in the Quay Arts Kashmir Café Tent on Thursday at 9pm and again on Saturday at 3pm

The album will be available on all the major download stores and on CD from the Solent Records web-site, CD Baby and distributed by Cadiz Music. Graham has already had interviews and airplay on dozens of radio stations all over the country and on several world-wide Internet stations.

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