

# ADAMSON

*this ain't no Duran Duran fanzine*



**Mr Adamson at the Eclectic show - photo thanks to Andrea Weeks**

# dear

# FOLKS

Ah, it's been a long time since I've given WTLF a good listen. I'm taking care of that even now as I write this. Speaking of long times, let's see a show of hands: how many of you thought I'd fallen off the face of the Earth? Right. I thought so. I don't blame you one bit. Worry not, there is still one more installment of AOU to go!

Allow me to get the ball rolling by sending a big, hearty THANKS! to all the kind folks who sent Christmas cards. I didn't get much time to celebrate... read on:

As I hope you have cleverly noticed by now, **I have moved!** The class of people in the old place was seriously taking a turn for the worst, and the landlord shrugged off my complaints about certain substances being used in the building. Due to the noise and his lack of backbone on that issue, I felt it best to cast my vote by not providing him rent money in support of that stuff. The new place is closer to work & more centralized (we got ourselves a *Super-Wal-Mart!*).

In honor of the whole fat-free craze going on, I'm cutting the "fat" out of AOU these last two issues - for the most part, these last two issues will strictly be articles on BC, no distractions such as "On My Desk" or ads for T-shirts and such. A few have commented in the past about "downsizing" AOU to give you more BC bang for your buck and I respect that idea. Plus I've got a pretty large surplus of BC articles and it is indeed my job to share them with you! It is here that I must thank David Booth, of the UK, for a great deal of the material in this issue - I also mistakenly listed him inside as *Chris Booth*. Sorry, David!

As for BC news, I ain't got any! Not a word from Ian since last issue. This in spite of the 90 BC/AOU Christmas cards I sent him in November to (hopefully) have signed by the guys and sent back so I could send out to all of you. Granted, I did send them kind of late in November, but I asked him to send them back even if they would arrive after Christmas. Nothing. This from the guy who pledged I would receive the same support as Jan at Country Club. I don't think so.

Sorry, folks, I'm getting cynical in my young age. Don't get me wrong, Ian was very kind to me in many respects for awhile there - he sent tons of articles, a couple photos, a few cd's, and set up the one interview I ever got with the band (via fax). Also to be considered is the fact that I can only be reached by mail. Hmmm, nah, I'm still irritated. I really planned to brighten the holidays for you folks, and I haven't asked much from the UK in quite awhile. I think the guys could've gotten together for a few moments and signed the cards and Ian could've stuck in an envelope easily enough.

Either way, I have consulted my trusty handy-dandy latest issue of Goldmine magazine and I see where there are at least two new BC releases on the tentative horizon - **Greatest Hits Live** with 14 self-explanatory tracks, and **Rarities**, a 2-cd package of "B-sides, live, unreleased and re-mixed." That's according to the Music Machine ad. They can be reached at 410-356-4567, or online at [musimac@aol.com](mailto:musimac@aol.com) and <http://www.musicmachine.com> - be sure to check with them or EQS (315-252-1999) to get those pre-ordered. I'm elated just to be able to pass that measly little morsel of info on!

*continued on back cover...*

# Peace *IN* Review of "The Seer" By Carol Clerk

*Our Time*

reprinted from *Melody Maker* June 28, 1986

I heard this album once before and that was on a plane, the day I bumped into Stuart Adamson and Bruce Watson on a flight to Edinburgh.

It all seemed very appropriate then, sitting above the clouds listening to Stuart's tales of winds and mists, stars and sun and rain and snow. But every airplane must eventually come back down to earth, and it's the same with Big Country music; for all of its romantic imagery, its heart is beating very much in our children's children's children in the local, national and international circumstance.

It's heartening that Adamson, confronted with the issues and implications of the present, has not yet lost hope, is still prepared to believe in the greater good of mankind. In "Eiledon", he sings of "Strength for us to find/To turn the old to new/And wipe our eyes of misty years/And see the future through". He's even more optimistic, more emotional, on "One Great Thing": "If there's one great thing to happen in my life/If there's one great day/If there's one great height/Let it be the time for peace/Let it be the time of right".

Passion and compassion are, of course, the forces that have always driven Big Country and their success in musical terms has been to present these convincingly as well as commercially, to encourage thought but to give us the thrill of the moment with their fiery rhythmic surge, their melodic cheer...and their originality.

There's a problem, though, with originality. Once it's established, once a group has created a sound that's unmistakably their own, it's then their duty to avoid boring people to death with it. The overwhelming temptation can be to "develop," to diversify miles beyond the outlines of the original blueprint or else to get extravagant, pile on layers of decoration to the point of suffocation. Big Country, with "The Seer," have done the opposite.

There's a simplicity about all of this that effectively serves to emphasise the scope which exists within their scheme of things, a scope that extends from the mellow flow of "Hold The Heart" to the straightforward punch of "I Walk The Hill," from the fresh charm of "The Sailor" to the ingenious melodic twists of "The Red Fox".

The Celtic elements are persuasive still for the same understatement: "Eiledon" is one of the most haunting songs the group has ever recorded, while the title track—which in other hands could have trivialised itself to the point of nonsense—succeeds as a lyrical ballad *and* a warning. The athletic warblings of Kate Bush offer an added attraction.

Really, "The Seer" sounds like a compilation album of greatest hits, all bound together by a central theme, such is the strength of its individual tracks. That a good half of it remained with me through all those weeks after Edinburgh says just about everything you need to know.

# BIG COUNTRY

reprinted from the  
Warner Reprise  
press kit for  
*Peace in Our Time*

It's been two years since the release of Big Country's last album and, as anyone involved in the business of music will attest, two years can be a very long time. Hopeful new arrivals, along with the music they make and the heat they generate, come and go with alarming regularity. Yesterday's sure thing is today's also-ran, while the sound of tomorrow is, as usual, anyone's guess.

It's the exceptions, of course, that prove the rule; bands that make their mark not just on sales charts, but in the fans' hearts, not by second guessing the trends but by that rare combination of innovation, instinct and integrity; bands that don't simply survive, but thrive, fashioning, instead of following, prevailing musical directions. Case in point: Big Country.

Since 1983, when the quartet burst onto the international music scene with their anthemic single, "In A Big Country," and continuing through three acclaimed albums, a nearly non-stop touring schedule and a string of hits that add up to almost a year-and-a-half on the charts, Big Country has earned the kind of reputation that is both hard-won and enduring. Simply put, Big Country is making music that lasts.

While '83 marked Big Country's emergence as a potent and compelling new force on the post-punk musical landscape, the group's roots stretch back considerably further, to the small Scottish town of Dunfermline. It was there a fledgling singer, songwriter and guitarist named Stuart Adamson first began fashioning a sound that borrowed as much from the music of his native country as it did from accepted rock or pop prescriptions. Adamson had formerly fronted some popular Scottish new wavers named The Skids, who, on occasion, shared the stage with another local aggregate, Delinx, featuring Dunfermline native Bruce Watson on guitar and vocals. Following the demise of their respective groups, Adamson and Watson began playing as a duo, performing Stuart's originals at the local community center.

The material, with its propulsive, guitar-driven rhythms and exuberant lyrics, went over well, prompting the pair to enter the studio for a demo-cutting session. All that was lacking was a convincing rhythm section. The bill was filled by two London-based musicians, bassist Tony Butler and drummer Mark Brzezicki, who had been knocking around the British music scene with the likes of Pete Townshend and the Pretenders. Legend has it that it only took a single song to convince the foursome that they had found, in each other, the substance to shape their future.

Whatever the case, Big Country's reputation as a vital, and viable, alternative to some of pop music's more studied extremes spread quickly, and by early 1982, they found themselves on tour, opening for the Jam as well as headlining their own shows. A recording contract followed in quick succession and the group released its debut single, "Harvest Home," late that same year.

It was followed by "Fields Of Fire," produced by a fast-rising young producer by the name of Steve Lillywhite. The combination of Lillywhite's wall of sound and Big Country's exultant energy struck sparks; a third single, the aforementioned "In A Big Country," shot to the top of the charts and, in August of 1983, the quartet's debut album, The Crossing, was released.

What was setting Big Country far apart from their competition, even at this early stage, was Adamson's extraordinary musical vision, embodied in songs that conveyed optimism, hope and faith, even as they reached beyond comfortable expectations to surprise and inspire. It was this spirit of reinventing and reinvigorating modern music's expressive potential that infused The Crossing, and fans worldwide responded by making it one of the most popular and acclaimed releases of the season. Remaining in the U.K. Top 40 for over a year, the LP attained the platinum plateau on both sides of the Atlantic, earning Big Country Best New Group honors in Rolling Stone Magazine as well as a Grammy and B.P.I. nominations.

Having, in no uncertain terms, arrived, Big Country immediately set about expanding both their following and their musical foundation. Two more Top 10 singles, "Chance" and "Wonderland," preceded the release of the band's second long player, Steeltown. In between albums, the group toured extensively in America, Europe and Asia and released a four-song EP in early 1984. Steeltown, another exemplary collection of Adamson originals, set to the group's thundering ensemble sound, garnered critical raves and streaked to the top of British album charts within weeks of its release. Among the LP's most memorable moments, "Where The Rose Is Sewn [sic]" and "Just A Shadow," were both released as singles. The LP's sharp social edge revealed yet another facet of Big Country's abundant talents, as did the subsequent world tour, demonstrating the quartet's increased command of the concert stage. Returning home in time to compose the soundtrack to the Scottish film Restless Natives, the group appeared at the finale of the historic Live Aid benefit concert before beginning an intensive period of woodshedding, resulting, in July of 1986, with the release of their third album, The Seer.

Debuting at No. 2 on the British charts and featuring "Look Away," the group's fourth Top 10 single, The Seer showcased what had by now become Big Country's trademark blend of passion and polished virtuosity. Renowned as much for their live show as for their recorded output, the group continued to pack houses around the world on a series of barnstorming tours. But beneath the momentum of a world-class band playing at the peak of their formidable skills, changes were brewing. Adamson and company were seeking fresh creative directions, stretching their musical envelope, searching for a new dimension to the vital interplay that has always defined the Big Country sound.

It was a process that took two years, entailed a fresh start at a new label and yielded what must be considered the most impressive and surprising album ever from a band whose career has virtually defined those terms. Peace In Our Time is the fourth Big Country LP, their first for Warner Bros. Records and a stunning collection of rich, revealing new music, resting on the solid foundation of their innovative original sound, even as it attains a new plateau of accessibility, thanks to some of the strongest, most assured, songwriting in Adamson's career. Witness, for example, "King Of Emotion," the LP's debut single; it combines Big Country's anthemic penchant with lyrics that manage to strike chords of both worldly wisdom and soaring hope.

When not in the studio fashioning this breathtaking new collection of songs, the band's members have been busy on a variety of projects. Drummer Mark Brzezicki, for example, performed for Prince Charles and Princess Diana for the recent Prince's Trust, as well as playing at the special Nelson Mandela benefit concert as part of a supergroup comprised of Phil Collins, Midge Ure, Paul Young and others.

Yet, as even a first listening will prove, the prime creative energy of Big Country over the past two years has been poured into the music of their remarkable new album. Produced by Peter Wolf (renowned for his work with Starship, the Commodores and other), Peace In Our Time is a resonant new chapter in a still-unfolding saga of Big Country, a band whose music speaks of bright hopes, hard truths and the enduring joys of the art of song.



Reprinted from The Sunday Mirror January 1st 1989

Courtesy of David Booth

*From the ghost town of Wittenoom in western Australia  
to Glasnost Rock in Estonia,  
Stuart Adamson's Scottish band are pushing back frontiers*  
By Martin Townsend

If you want to see the world, join Big Country. "I definitely didn't want to spend my life in the place where I was brought up," says Stuart Adamson, the man who built the band. "I always thought it would be pretty groovy to be a musician, travel a bit, play a bit and have a bit of brass at the end of it."

For Adamson - who still lives with his wife, Sandra, and their two children in the rambling old manor house he's bought near his native Dunfermline - the wish came true. But not even he could have imagined how it would turn out, for the band's most recent globetrotting upstages even Indiana Jones.

When Big Country wanted to shoot videos for their recent singles *King Of Emotion* and *Broken Heart*, they decided Shepherds Bush [hometown of the band Bush - AOU ED] or Scarborough weren't interesting enough. Instead, they took a 32-hour journey to Wittenoom in the outback of Western Australia, to shoot footage of the 200 million year old rock formations of Hamersley Gorge.

Sixty years ago, Wittenoom was a 10,000-strong mining community, complete with a racecourse, an open-air cinema decorated with murals of Charlie Chaplin, and football and cricket pitches. But the Wittenoomers used to mine deadly asbestos, and after bitter controversy about how much the government knew about the health risks, the mines closed.

Now, Wittenoom is a ghost town with a population of roughly 52, including half a dozen mineral company prospectors nicknamed the Driller Killers. Big Country bassist Tony Butler first encountered these ominous, hard-drinking men in the town's solitary bar, the Fortescue. "The piano stopped playing, the glasses stopped chinking and everyone turned round," recalls Tony.

Fears of a wild west style showdown went unrealised despite the lurid reputation of these denizens of the outback. The band were invited to a 'pig' - slang for a barbecue - and the Drillers ended up posing for pictures with the lads.

Having signed a petition to save the Fortescue from demolition, Big Country said goodbye to Wittenoom and its gift shop selling little pieces of blue and white asbestos, and turned their eyes to eastern Europe. Last September, the quartet went to Tallinn in Estonia, 50 miles across the Baltic from Finland, to play at Glasnost Rock '88. It was the largest Soviet rock festival in history and 180,000 people turned out.

The trip made a big impression on Adamson, a solidly working-class Scot who has often written serious-minded songs about unemployment and the decline of British industry. "More and more groups must come and work within this system and change it," proclaimed Stuart.

Big talk, but Big Country proved to be as good as their word. In October, the band and a plane-load of Western journalists and film crews jetted out to Moscow, where Big Country had lined up five concerts at the city's Palace of Sports to celebrate Mr. Gorbachev's new spirit of openness and cultural exchange. The trip didn't go entirely according to plan - the chartered aircraft nearly landed on top of another one trying to take off and their luggage was delayed for hours in Moscow.

Big Country eventually got on stage and defied power failures to deliver some rousing shows. They had a lot riding on the Russian trip - apart from their reputation. They'd invested 500,000 pounds of their own money in film crews, sound equipment, flights and accommodation. What's more, because of Soviet regulations, any profits made couldn't be exported back home with the band, and the group were stunned when the Soviet authorities told them they had to "donate" their valuable amplification system for the use of Muscovite rockers. Adamson manages to raise a ghost of a grin: "It's a Scottish trait to have a sense of humour in times of adversity."

The trip could still turn out to be a wise investment. With Glasnost galloping ahead and the Soviet Union increasingly keen to encourage its own rock groups as well as western visitors, the Soviet record-buying market could soon become the largest in the world.

## Rock n Roll reader's guide

*This is a really neat book, gang, and guess what? We're in it! It's a comprehensive collection of all sorts of rock and roll media, from biggies like Rolling Stone right down to 1/1 of AOU! Mr. Krebs, the author, has obviously burned the midnight oil compiling as much resource material as possible on your favorite bands and musicians. Looking for a music magazine with a specific tilt? Lost the address for that Kate Bush fanzine? Try the Rock N Roll Reader's Guide! The index is incredible and will get you the info you need fast, or, if you really want to have some fun, simply browse the main section alphabetically, artist by artist - you wouldn't believe some of the stuff you'll see! The book is published by Billboard Books and runs \$21.95 at any bookstore worth its salt.*

### BIG COUNTRY

#### FANZINES AND FAN CLUBS

All of Us. Att. James D. Birch,

Fanzine strictly for North American fans that claims support from the band and its management. The 32-page booklet contains black-and-white photographs, album reviews, member articles and comments, profiles, some merchandising, an Internet Directory, and more. The cost of four annual issues is \$12 per year.



# THE Restless Natives

REPRINTED FROM SOUNDS, MAY 19th 1990

*In the summer of 1989, Big Country were close to splitting up when Mark Brzezicki quit the band. Now they're back with a new drummer Pat Ahern and a new single "Save Me." They're also back in the studio working on their first LP since 1988's "Peace In Our Time." And if that wasn't enough, a collection of their greatest hits, "Through A Big Country," has just been released. This week, band supremo Stuart Adamson guides Paul Elliot track by track through a Big Country, recalling eight years as one of Britain's most enduring rock combos.*

**Harvest Home - Released September 1982**

*We were playing club gigs. Our biggest crowd was about 100. I remember when I was still in the Skids, seeing U2 play to about 100 people at Valentino's in Edinburgh and just thinking, This is brilliant, everybody else is just pissing against the wind. You think that when you see bands in their infancy, I don't think bands can sustain that level of intrigue over eight or nine years. Harvest Home was the most immediate song we had. It had an obvious verse and chorus. Stuff like In A Big Country and Fields of Fire wasn't even written when that was recorded. That single came at a time when I realized that the band had a grasp of something really special.*

**Fields Of Fire - Released February 1983**

*We were fairly confident that it would do well because we had a groundswell of support from the gigs, although we played to just six people in Manchester. We didn't let it affect our performance though! Fields Of Fire is very representative of Big Country. It's a unique style of guitar playing. People have done things like it - pastiches, parodies almost - which I find really horrible. People doing jiggy songs. Jigs have never been the ethnic part of our music. It's hard to convince people that mine and Bruce's guitar playing isn't a formula, it's just what we are. We started recording the album when Fields Of Fire was in the top 10 in America. It was the old bagpipe guitar sound. They'd never heard it before. And they're sick of hearing it since! I did an interview in America and they actually put subtitles under my answers!*

**In A Big Country - Released May 1983**

*Mark used to say at the time, Y'know, we've created a monster! Suddenly, everybody wanted a piece of the action. I was fortunate in that I'd been through that with the Skids. It's exciting, but there's a tinge of sadness to it all. You can't look back. I don't think we ever really thought about how much impact that had on us as people. We went from the \*\*\*\*ing bottom of Division 4 to being contenders for the First Division Championship within the space of six months, and it does your nut in, I don't care who you are!*



### **Chance - Released August 1983**

*I like the wee subtle things, the acoustic numbers. I like that ring of sincerity and sentimentality. Is Chance our classic tearjerker? I think so. In a way, Chance has worked perfectly because it's become other people's song more than ours. This tour may be the last time songs like Chance are played. It lends too much predictability to the live show. Chance has been one of the peaks of the live show for a long time. It's time to produce another song.*

### **Wonderland - Released January 1984**

*Because the American record company was so desperate for new material - specifically, the second album - that they got together a lot of unreleased material and B-sides and Wonderland and released it on a 10-inch EP [HUH? - AOU ED]. A lotta people thought it was our second album. I really like Wonderland. The side of Big Country that's about innocence and a sense of wonder and a belief in how people can get it on with each other [HUH twice! - AOU ED], it's all there in Wonderland. The song just came out of a jam. It's a bit dense as a single but as a song it works great.*

### **East Of Eden - Released October 1984**

*At times we've gone with difficult singles, something we've not been given credit for. East Of Eden is a pretty dark song, pretty bleak, with an unrelenting and uncompromising lyric. It tells the story the way it is. As an album, Steeltown is hard and dense, listening to it from start to finish is exhausting. There's a lotta bleakness in there, but I had to do it. All my life I wanted to make a record that got all the chips off my shoulders, all the things I'd been carrying around since I was a kid. People wanted us to be this soft, romantic band that professional Scotsmen could play their fiddles at campfires to. We wanted Steeltown to be hard.*

### **Where The Rose Is Sown - Released December 1984**

*I'm a helluva pessimistic and doom-laden person at times. I doubt there's a shred of optimism or hope in Where The Rose Is Sown! Let's get this on daytime radio - I'm sure the people working in John Menzies will love hearing this. Sure, you can sing along to it. I'm sure a lot of people have sung along to 'Love Will Tear Us Apart' too.*

### **Just A Shadow - Released January 1985**

*Just A Shadow is an encapsulation of the whole of Steeltown. It's a song about people not achieving their potential. It's very indicative of the time when it was written, right in the middle of the miners' strike. It summed up a lot of what I felt, having grown up in a mining family. I tried to do justice to the people involved, to write about them with dignity. As the Tap say, There's a fine line between clever and stupid. It's easy to be clumsy and sing about things in stadium rock terms. And God forbid, that should be the last thing you should want to do. I don't know if Just A Shadow works like the song I wrote in my bedroom when it's played in a big hall; it doesn't, it just gets overblown.*

### **The Seer - Album released February 1986**

*I'm a huge fan of Kate Bush, who sang on The Seer itself. She writes great songs. Great lyrics, has a great voice, she's an all-round happening dude really. I liked some of the folkier things she'd done so I sent her a rough version of The Seer and she worked out about three million ideas for it. We just let her get on with it. When you see somebody that unaffected, that natural, it's really inspiring. I hope I've been like that for somebody at some stage.*

### **Look Away - Released April 1986**

*It's a very straightforward, R&B-based lick that works really well as a simple pop song. It's probably the most pop-based thing we've done. The lyrical content isn't so straightforward; it's a historical cameo piece about a guy who was the last old-style outlaw in the States, holding up trains in the 20th century. Look Away doesn't hold any pretensions other than, Here's a little ditty that tells an interesting story that you might find a place in your heart for.*

### **Restless Natives - Released April 1986; B-side of Look Away**

*That was brilliant. I'd like to do more soundtracks, but we're not hip enough to get offered film stuff now. Restless Natives is a great story about two guys living in Edinburgh who start robbing American tourist buses in the Highlands to make some money. And by a twist they end up giving a lot of this money away and end up becoming latter-day Robin Hood figures.*

### **The Teacher - Released July 1986**

*This was like The Shadows meets The Velvet Underground! I don't know where the song came from. I just wanted to write a weird song about a guy who sat up all night stoned, thinking he had a great idea when he actually didn't. [Way to let me down, Stu! - AOU ED]*

### **One Great Thing - Released August 1986**

*Tony and myself had a whole load of folkie licks which we were almost scared to use because people would say, Och, that's the same old Big Country. Then we just said, Sod it, it's no less valid just because it comes naturally to us. With One Great Thing I cast aside my inhibitions about my folk roots. I dinnae think growing up in Scotland being exposed to and influenced by the ethnic music of Scotland is any less valid than some black guy living in Detroit. It's what I am. I just wanted to write loud folk songs that give people a shiver up the back. I canna play One Great Thing anymore cos it was used in an advert and it just makes me laugh now. Some people are a bit precious about rock music being in adverts - come off it, most bands are signed to multinational companies.*

### **King Of Emotion - Released August 1988**

*I grew up playing R&B music and hadn't played any for ages, so with King Of Emotion we just cranked out a Stones riff and gave it some, y'know? The whole of the Peace In Our Time album had a different sound. We tried to emphasise the songs rather than just have the instruments blaring. In the end we actually robbed the band away too much. Of all our four albums, that's the one I'd change most.*

### **Broken Heart - Released November 1988**

*I think it's the best song I've ever written. It works great on acoustic or electric. When you go back to your work and do things like that and Peace In Our Time (the song) acoustically, you can see what's at the heart of those songs. I like that emotive quality when songs are played like that. Thirteen Valleys is the one that got away, totally. I'll play that song, always. I'd put it up against any song.*

### **Peace In Our Time - released January 1989**

*I think we caught a mood when we went to Russia. If only we in the West could become as free as they are! Maybe that trip was one of the Great Rock Disasters Of All Time, but you have to try things in the spirit of The Grand Rock Gesture, y'know? I do feel music can be more than a three-minute adrenaline rush, but there's a great danger in viewing a song with too much weight. Peace In Our Time was written with irony, but you can be too smart-assed for your own good. People like to put rock music in a big perspective, especially after Live Aid. Peace In Our Time was called a plea for peace when it was really much smaller than that.*

### **Save Me - Released April 1990**

*Save Me is a more blues-based thing. Last year I played a lotta songs with a few mates from Dunfermline. It was stuff I hadn't played since I was 15 years old, and Save Me sorta grew out of that. I wanted the lyrics to have this quasi-religious gospel feel. And I like the loud guitars. All I ever wanted to be was a loud guitar player...*

# Big Country untamed

From *Rolling Stone*, December 8, 1983

Stuart Adamson remembers the night well. It was about two years ago, shortly after he had parted ways with a band called the Skids. He was lying in bed, thinking, the way he did every night before he drifted off to sleep, when it suddenly came to him: *Big Country*. Perfect! It was exactly what he'd been looking for, the ideal moniker for his new group.

The name worked on two levels. It conveyed the sort of rural aspect of the band's Scottish roots, which are so important to Stuart. This was not, after all, a group manufactured in the corporate bowels of the London music industry, nor was it one born in the industrial gloom of places like Manchester and Liverpool. No, this was a band that had little to do with current fashions or trends or politics. And its music--the stirring, Celtic-flavored anthems and Stuart's own unconventional guitar playing, which at times recalls such traditional instruments as bagpipes or fiddles--was as folkish as it was modern.

But most important, Stuart thought, as he lay in bed on that quiet, peaceful night in his hometown of Dunfermline, Scotland, the name *Big Country* suggested the breadth of the band's ambitions. It was symbolic of the large territory he had staked out for the group--territory he and his fellow musicians would explore and develop in the years to come.

Like so many other British kids, Stuart had been inspired by what he viewed as the positive elements of the punk movement. Those early years of punk, 1976 and 1977, were his favorites because for him they marked the first time that young people had a chance to get up and express themselves onstage in the manner in which they saw fit. To Stuart, punk wasn't about a certain style of music or dress. It was about being able to write songs that honestly express your emotions, your feelings, your observations, and then sharing those songs with an audience that was your equal, not one that worshipped you as a kind of demigod, the way the Rolling Stones and the Who had come to be worshipped.

When the Skids started out in Dunfermline in 1977, the four original band members shared Stuart's attitudes about music. But by the time of their third album, *The Absolute Game*, in 1980, things had soured. Lead singer Richard Jobson had become something of a preening, posing dilettante, dabbling in poetry and theater. And the audience no longer seemed to matter so much. So Stuart left the band and returned to his hometown, where he set out to form a new group, one that would not stray from that idealistic path. And lying in bed on that night in 1981, Stuart made up his mind: the band would be called *Big Country*.

Mark Brzezicki perks up. A waiter at New York's Peking Duck House has just passed the table, his arms loaded down with platters of the house specialty, giving *Big Country's* tall, stocky, twenty-six-year-old drummer cause to break the momentary silence. "This," says Brzezicki, pointing to the trayful of crispy ducks, "is the kind of place where they say, 'I'll bring you the *bill* later.'"

The other members of Big Country--Adamson, guitarist Bruce Watson and bassist Tony Butler--groan loudly. But the bad jokes don't stop. Adamson picks up his glass of Tsingtao beer and offers a toast to New York: "I'm so happy to be here," says the twenty-five-year-old guitarist, "in the city where so many other musicians have died before me."

When the four members of Big Country are together, that kind of playful camaraderie always emerges. "Even if we didn't play any instruments, I think it would have been a great loss to all of us if we hadn't met one another," Brzezicki says of their friendship.

But team spirit aside, there are plenty of other reasons to be cheerful on this night. Big Country's debut album, *The Crossing*, has made it all the way to Number Two on the British charts, while in America, the notoriously conservative radio programmers jumped on the record and made it one of the ten most-played LPs almost as soon as it was released. Based on initial sales figures in the U.S., word was that *The Crossing* was almost certain to sell at least a half million copies.

But Big Country's is no overnight-success story, not by a long shot. Chris Briggs, the A&R man who signed the band to Britain's Phonogram Records and its American sister company, PolyGram, can attest to that. "The first nine months were harrowing," says Briggs, who also works with ABC, Def Leppard and Dire Straits, among others. "I definitely had some sleepless nights. There were moments of brooding into my beer, thinking, 'Maybe I'm just crazy.'"

Briggs had been an admirer of Adamson's ever since hearing his soaring guitar on the Skids' punkish "Into the Valley," a British hit in 1979. So when Stuart struck out on his own, the London-based A&R man high-tailed it up to Scotland to see what he was up to. It was not an overly impressive sight, as Briggs recalls. "Big Country at that time was Stuart and four local guys. Stuart was like the master, and they were his pupils."

It wasn't, Briggs remembers thinking, a lineup destined for greatness. "Stuart was already too advanced to wait for young players to pick up sufficient skill. It would have taken too long, and Stuart would have lost momentum. He needed people who could do it right there on the spot, musicians who would chase him."

Despite Briggs' advice, the guitarist took that nascent version of Big Country on the road as an opening act for, of all people, Alice Cooper. It was a tour he'd just as soon forget. "We were treated very badly," he says. "We got our gear onstage as the people were coming in through the doors. And Alice Cooper, well, I couldn't believe it when I saw him. It was just completely over-the-top heavy metal."

In addition to reinforcing Adamson's attitudes about the despicable state of much of the old-line music business, those shows also convinced him that Briggs had been right about Big Country. "It showed how wrong we were. I think it's important that people in a group are drawn toward the same things, toward the same goal. And that just wasn't there in that lineup."

Still, Adamson was impressed by the playing of Bruce Watson, the young guitarist he'd been working with. So after giving the other three musicians their pink slips, he retreated with Bruce to the basement of a local community center in Dunfermline and continued writing songs and rehearsing.

Meanwhile, Briggs followed their progress and after a while was sufficiently impressed to invite them to London to cut a demo for Phonogram. Around the same time, Adamson got a call from Butler, whom he'd met on his last tour.

Back then, Butler, Brzezicki and Pete Townshend's younger brother, guitarist Simon Townshend, had been playing in a trio called On the Air. That group had since broken up, but Brzezicki and Butler had established themselves as first-rate London sessionmen, playing with the elder Townshend and numerous others. Needing a rhythm section, Stuart asked them to play on Big Country's demo.

"Something just clicked," Adamson recalls. "It was magic right from...well, I don't know what it was. It's like when you suddenly discover that feeling you can get on a sunny winter's morning when, even though it's really cold, the sun is out and you get a whole surge of energy that makes you feel great. It just felt like that."

"The hair went up on the backs of my legs," says Briggs a tad more succinctly. "I was so sure that this combination of four people was going to work."

So sure, in fact, that Briggs signed the group on the spot and quickly ushered them into the studio with producer Chris Thomas. Given Thomas' track record—he'd worked with everyone from Paul McCartney and Elton John to Roxy Music, the Pretenders and the Sex Pistols—and the fact that he'd already been in the studio with Butler and Brzezicki when they did Townshend's two most recent solo albums, the pairing seemed bound to result in something truly special. Or so Briggs thought.

"For whatever reason, it just didn't jell," Briggs says. "Maybe we put them in the studio too early. Maybe it was because Stuart had never sung up front before." No matter what, Briggs was beginning to panic. Had he made a mistake? Had his instincts been wrong? "I was definitely having crises of confidence. I don't want to over-romanticize it, but I didn't have a very happy Christmas last year."

The sessions with Thomas did yield one single, "Harvest Home." But that track barely made it into the Top Hundred in Britain. It was a critical point in Big Country's career. They were a new band, and they had failed to come up with the goods after months of working with one of the world's top producers. Briggs had enough faith in the group to give them one more shot, but if it didn't work this time, well, there probably wouldn't be a third chance.

The band decided to try Steve Lillywhite, the young producer who had helped shape U2's similarly guitar-dominated sound. "Steve had four spare days," says Briggs, "and we went into the studio just to establish that he and the group could work together." Lillywhite made one important suggestion: instead of rehashing the same material the band had plowed to death with Thomas, why didn't they try recording a new song?

Big Country selected a tune called "400 Miles," an anthemic, anti-war number Adamson had written at the time of the Falklands crisis about "somebody who goes off to war and just doesn't come back." With Lillywhite behind the board, the magic that had been present at the demo sessions suddenly reappeared. "It worked the first time," says Briggs, "and it worked better than we could have hoped."

The song's title was changed to "Fields of Fire," and within a matter of weeks, Big Country had their first Top Ten single in Britain. Briggs had been vindicated. "I finally came off the Valium," he says.

Stuart Adamson looks up from his plate of crispy shredded beef. There's a glimmer in his narrow, almost lidless eyes. He says he has some good news to report: his father is due to return home to Scotland after having spent the past five years in Shanghai.

Shanghai? "We were on the dole together," Stuart starts to explain. "I saw this advert for a job overseas, gave it to him and off he went. He was a shipbuilding engineer over there; he built something like 150 ships."

Adamson's father had always had a bit of the old wanderlust about him. In fact, despite his parents' Scottish background, Stuart was actually born in Manchester, where his dad was working at the time. His family moved back to Scotland when Stuart was about six months old, but thanks to a twenty-year stint in the merchant marines, Stuart's father wasn't around the house too much. "I used to get up and put the fire on in the morning and get my sister ready for school, because my mom was away working at her job in an electronics factory. And when she came home at night, I'd have the dinner made."

His mother also had a job in a music shop, and when she'd send Stuart out on Saturday mornings to do the shopping, she'd give him a few extra shillings so he could buy a new single. "I got everything from Billy Fury to the Kinks," says Adamson. "I think the first record I ever bought with my own money was 'Death of a Clown,' by Dave Davies."

From the time he was twelve, Adamson was writing songs and itching to be in a band. But he also enjoyed school, particularly geography and English, and at one point he seriously considered going to college to study to become an English teacher. "I liked George Orwell, D.H. Lawrence, Kafka, Chekhov. To me, reading's the same as meeting people--you can learn things from it, find out about yourself."

Music, Adamson firmly believes, can serve the same purpose, which is why he's chosen it as his career. But the rigors of touring--by the end of 1983, Big Country will have played about 1110 dates in Britain, Europe and America--can take their toll on family life. While on the road, Adamson phones Sandra, his wife of three years, and Callum, their nearly two-year-old son, as often as possible. But no matter what the phone company says, long-distance calls aren't the same as being there, and Stuart, remembering his own fatherless childhood, frequently feels guilty about his extended absences.

Because of that, he was compelled to do something he said he'd never do--buy a videotape recorder. "I didn't want one on principle. It's just far too easy to flop back in your armchair, watch your video machine and ignore the rest of the world." But he finally gave in--not so his family could watch movies while he was on tour, but for another reason: "I wanted Callum to have a record of what I was doing, so he'd know why his daddy was away so much."

When he is home, Adamson tries to spend as much time as possible with his son. "It's great to watch the wee one, because kids can't hide their feelings at all. They're just so pure about everything. It's all unembarrassed. I think adults lose a lot of that. You get sort of conditioned. It'd be great if you could stay like that always--have the maturity that the years bring you and still have the great naivete and passion for everything."

Adamson draws similar strength from his wife, a former British Highland dance champion. "It's good to have a stable relationship. It's nice just to be able to go home and relax in that sort of atmosphere and think about what it is you ought to do. It's important to me."

Like Stuart, Sandra grew up around Dunfermline, and in fact, it was through her brother, a musician who now plays in a band called White China, that Adamson met Big Country's spiky-haired, twenty-two-year-old guitarist, Bruce Watson.

Bruce lives on the other side of the railway tracks from us," says Stuart. "So we always joke about which one comes from the wrong side of the tracks. I think it's Bruce. Sometimes he's a real animal. He's definitely the character of the group. If anybody's feeling a bit down or anything like that, Bruce is around to get him going again." Together, Watson and Adamson have fashioned the twin-guitar attack that gives Big Country's music much of its power and appeal. "It's something I've been pushing for since the Skids," says Stuart.

"Basically, I've heard enough of 'Johnny B. Goode' to last me the next twenty-five years. Bruce and I work off each other quite a lot. We do a lot of harmony work, and we each have our own effects. But what's more important is that we like to orchestrate the parts so they illustrate whatever feelings might be in the song."

The conversation has clearly taken on a tone far too serious for Brzezicki, who's been busily piling down portions of the Peking duck. Pushing his plate aside, he decides it's time to put in his two cents' worth. "If you want to know the real secret of our guitar sound," he says, "I'll tell you. It's in my drum kit."

The last time Pete Townshend saw Tony Butler, he couldn't believe how ecstatic the Big Country bassist was. Townshend was producing his brother Simon's solo album in a London recording studio when Butler stopped by to say hello. "He couldn't speak," the Who's guitarist remembers. "I said, 'How are things?' And he said, 'Unb... b... unbelievable.' I said to Simon, 'You know, I'm worried about Tony. When he comes down, he's gonna come down with such a crash.' But he'll be all right."

Sitting in the Peking Duck, the short, muscular twenty-six year-old is still beaming. And it's not just because of Big Country. Only a week earlier, his girlfriend, Jackie Whitburn, gave birth to their first child, a seven-pound, ten-ounce boy they named Alexander.

"He Couldn't have called him Tony," Brzezicki Cracks. "Have you ever heard of Tony the Great?"

Now, after living together for eight years, Tony and Jackie are finally making plans to be married. "My life has gone through such rapid changes in the past two weeks," Butler says with a sigh.

It's tempting to call Tony Butler the nicest man in rock & roll. Softspoken and polite, he seems out of place in this world where ego and excess are the norm. But he's an undeniably solid musician, and onstage his shyness disappears. "Tony always flies," says Townshend. "He has a side he displays onstage that doesn't appear anywhere else."

Butler has known the Townshend family for years, having grown up in the same part of London, a place called Ealing. Even though his parents hail from Dominica in the West Indies, Butler, like Adamson and Watson, has a bit of Scottish blood in him. "My grandfather was born in Edinburgh," he explains. "He emigrated to the West Indies, where he started a brewery."

Unfortunately, after getting married and fathering nine children, Tony's grandfather was overcome by what might be called any occupational hazard. "He died of drink," says Butler. Tony's parents moved back to Britain, where they thought there would be more opportunities, but his father, a welder, passed away when Tony was six, leaving his mother to raise the family.

"My mum leads a fairly simple life. She's a matron in an old people's home, and she really doesn't know much about rock & roll. So when people come up to her and say, 'I saw your son on *Top of the Pops*'--well, she's a little bit confused about it."

Butler began playing with Simon Townshend when he was thirteen and Simon was nine. Their first band was called Clear Peace, and Pete Townshend has rather fond memories of just how awful they were. "I've got a picture of them in the back of my Mercedes 600 stretch limousine," Pete says. "They all look like they're about six years old, and they were just coming back after making some demos at a studio I had in the country. And I've never seen such a miserable looking bunch in my life. Simon looks like he's just been hit in the face with a wet fish."

Simon agrees that they were far from being a talented outfit. "That was when Tony's brother was singing. After he did the lead vocal, we all crowded around the mike and started making this horrible noise, and Pete came in and said, 'That sounds worse than the Who!'"

But Tony and Simon were not to be discouraged; they placed an ad for a drummer in the back pages of *Melody Maker*. Mark Brzezicki, who lived in nearby Slough, auditioned and got the job. Considering his own inauspicious rock & roll debut, he was the right man for Tony and Simon: "I didn't have enough money to buy a full drum kit," Brzezicki recalls. "I had one tom-tom and a bass drum, so I made another tom-tom out of corrugated cardboard. I used cellophane for the drum skin and coat hangers for the legs." The first time he tried to use the creation in public, disaster struck. "It was at this workingman's pub, and somebody arrived late, opened the fire exit door, and the drum blew right off the stage!"

First as the Simon Townshend Band and later as *On the Air*, Brzezicki, Butler and Townshend tried to establish themselves around England. But the shadow of Simon's older brother dogged them. "Simon Townshend is a young Pete Townshend," says Brzezicki. "Not because he tries to be, but he just can't help it. He sings like him. He's got the same musical mind. He plays the same."

Butler and Brzezicki finally split with Simon and ensconced themselves in the London studio scene. It was a year and a half of ups and downs. There were the good sessions, like those for Pete's *Empty Glass* and *All the Best Cowboys Have Chinese Eyes* LPs. There were the silly ones, like those for TV ads and football songs. And there were the miserable ones, the ones where they were summoned to some dingy studio or the ones where some tanked-up producer would keep them hostage even though nothing was being accomplished.

All the while, though, they longed to be in a band. But when Adamson finally came along, Butler found himself in the position of having to choose between Big Country and the Pretenders. "The Pretenders actually asked me to join the Pretenders and get instant fame and fortune? Or do I battle it out with a bunch of guys that I really like?"

Though he agreed to play on the Pretenders' "Back on the Chain Gang" single, he decided against joining the band. "The Pretenders had done a lot and burned themselves out in too short a time and didn't really seem to have a lot more to look forward to. But with Big Country, every day is like a different experience, a new adventure. I think what struck us all was the fact that we had an unspoken common idea of life. I mean, I can't be very articulate about this, but we've got this feeling that we just want to go out and play good music, treat people with respect and treat ourselves with respect, as well."

Right now it seems as if Butler made the right choice. And Big Country's success has enabled him to fulfill a promise he made years ago, when he was getting a bank loan so he could buy one of his earliest bass guitars. "I was sitting there, trying to explain the music business to my bank manager. I was after a Rickenbacker, but then I thought I'd settle for a copy, because it was much cheaper." The bank manager wouldn't have that, however. He gave Butler the money for the more expensive guitar. He wanted only one thing in return. "He said, 'You do me proud, boy.'"

Last spring, at the end of one of the final shows on U2's British tour, Stuart Adamson found himself onstage at London's Hammersmith Palais, along with U2's lead vocalist Bono and the Alarm's Mike Peters, singing an impromptu rendition of Bob Dylan's "Knockin' on Heaven's Door."

It was no coincidence that these three performers should be sharing the same stage. Big Country, the Alarm and U2 represent a new generation of rock & rollers. Given the similarities of the three bands' music - all of them write rousing, guitar-driven



songs of hope and promise - it would be easy to label this as the latest trend. In fact, some have already done that: "nouveau rock" Britain's NME called it. But what really unites these groups - and there no doubt will be others joining their ranks - has more to do with their spirit and attitude than it does with their sound. And in all three cases, it's a spirit that was born out of the punk movement.

"Whether it was naivete or stupidity, we all believed in the '76 explosion," says Bono. "What we want to do is tear down the star trips and break down the barrier between the stage and the audience." [What happened there, Mr. Bono? Forget something? - AOU ED]

Though Adamson is wary about being lumped in with other like-minded groups, he agrees with Bono. "Our definition of success is this: if you can put in your songs a feeling that can touch someone in the same way it touched you when you wrote it, or in any other way, then you're successful. It's really important for us to be able to share what we do. For us, anyone who buys our records or comes to our shows is as much a part of the group as we are."

Of course, other idealists, like those original punks the Clash, have expressed similar feelings, only to abandon them at the first taste of success. But so far, Adamson has been true to his word. Like the Alarm and U2, Big Country regularly take time out after their shows to meet with their fans. "It's so important to do that," says Adamson. "If you're trying to put your feelings into your songs and kids want to come and talk to you about that and you just ignore them, well, you're just making a complete \*\*\*\*\* out of yourself."

And the band has turned down two potentially lucrative tour offers that might have significantly furthered its career. One would have involved opening the Who's 1982 stadium tour of America (an offer the Clash jumped at), while the other was for a spot on David Bowie's similarly large-scale tour of Britain this past summer.

"I'm not too keen on outdoor gigs," explains Adamson. "A lot of the time, the sound is really bad, and the people in the back can't even see what's going on. I've always felt really sorry for the people way in the back."

It's that concern for the audience, that feeling that the band members are really no different from the people they're playing to, that makes Big Country special. As Adamson says, "It's people that make the group, not the group that makes the people."



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# Stuart Adamson

Reprinted from STAR HITS, December 1986

thanks to Chris Booth of Scotland

*So what has Stuart Adamson of Big Country been up to recently? Well, er, quite a lot actually. He's been out on the 'road,' he's been nearly eaten alive, he's been interviewed by William Shaw, he's ...*

*been nipping about alot.*

We finished the LP, *The Seer*, in February of this year and we've been on the road since March. We did three British tours, we've been to Canada, America, Sweden, Holland, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland... we've been lots of places. *He hasn't been giving two hoots about people who say that all Big Country's songs sound the same.*

I don't give two hoots about it. It really doesn't trouble me at all. I don't make records so that people can say to me, Isn't that startlingly like Big Country! Who *else* is going to make records that sound like Big Country? We *are* Big Country! (Laughs) Our songs are all different. What's the same is the commitment. Take the song *The Seer*. It's nothing like *Hold The Heart* or *Look Away*. If people say they sound the same, that's their opinion. Opinions are like arseholes. Everybody's got one.

*He's been talking a lot about "commitment."*

I think that's part of the reason we've been successful. There's a commitment in the group. If there's one thing that runs through all of Big Country's work it's that it's all done with the same amount of commitment and excitement and genuine feeling people identify with that. Too many people go for far too low a common denominator and think of 'the kids' as some mass of mindless morons. There's a responsibility to create music that's worthwhile and lasting and invokes a sense of involvement in the real world rather than some fictitious desert island... but then again, it's only bloody pop music.

*He hasn't been worrying whether he's trendy or not.*

The first band I ever went to see was *Led Zeppelin*. It was the Caird Hall in Dundee in 1972. They're a bit trendier now but it wasn't easy to explain that 10 years ago in the heady days of punk. Things always go in cycles, don't they? Maybe in 10 years Big Country will be trendy. Do I *want* to be trendy? I'm not really fussed. We're trendy in *my* house and that's what matters!

*He's had another baby.*

My daughter was born last year, just before I began work on *The Seer*. There's a lot of work in the house when there are two children to be brought up. Am I domesticated? I don't know - you'd better ask Sandra about that.

*He's been fishing*

Yeah, I'm really heavy into fly fishing...

*...and he's been riding around on motorbikes.*

Yes. And I've been sponsoring the Big Country Motorcycle racing team which did very well this year. One guy finished fourth in the National 1300 Production Championship and another guy won the MCA Production Championship which was splendid. I try to ride when I can. Do I ever fall off? Falling off is part of it. I've been in a couple of accidents but they've never been anything major. I was coming down to do Pop Quiz one day and it was wet and I was late for my plane. I came off going round this corner - I was leaning to far. I had a few stitches in my arm. I've never been seriously maimed though.

*He's turned down a position on the board of Dunfermline Athletic Football Club.*

They offered me it which was really nice but if I was going to do it I'd have to do it properly or not at all. So I had to pass on it, but at least it's made me friendly with a few people in the club. It was nice to be asked to help but I'm not into *half*-doing things. It's good to see that they're doing so well though, they're at the top of Division One in Scotland and if they carry on the way they're doing they'll be in the Premier League next year. I always try to go if I'm at home; I've seen five matches so far this season. I'm not really interested in football though because of the 'Eeh ver lads' - that terrace thug's idea of football. I actually enjoy watching the game, I think it's a splendid sport.

*He's been recording a film soundtrack.*

It took me up to the end of March last year to finish the score for this new film *Restless Natives*. We had a few arguments with the director and stuff because I'd written almost two hours of completely original material but they wanted to put on all this older Big Country stuff. I was going, Look, I've written this stuff and it goes much better with what you're trying to do, but it caused us a bit of hassle at the time. The film suffered from it as well, but I like the finished product. The script is excellent.

*He's been grumpy in the mornings.*

I'm a terrible man in the morning. I'm *appalling*. If I get up early enough it's OK - about 7 o'clock. Otherwise I'm the most crabby so-and-so you've ever met in your life. Everyone who knows me will verify that. I'm absolutely hopeless.

*He's been reading poems by a bloke called Hugh MacDiarmid.*

He's a Scottish poet, or he *was* a Scottish poet; he died a few years ago - and he was also a founder member of the Scottish nationalist party. Reading his poems gave me the idea for *The Seer*. He had this idea for a Scotland that was modern and vital and outward-looking and not one that was just a sentimental picture of claret, whisky and bagpipes - a country that was part of the world. I don't think I can ever put things the way he did...

*He hasn't been eaten by a shark.*

No. The closest I've ever been was in Miami and that wasn't very close at all. The story got blown up a bit. It was quite amusing. We were on the beach at Fort Lauderdale and suddenly the coastguards began hollering for everyone to get out of the water quick. I was miles out at sea. You know that feeling you get when you're swimming in the sea and you think, Is there something underneath? I was crapping myself.

*He's been listening to records.*

I'm currently into The Smiths. I think that *The Queen Is Dead* album is a masterpiece. I think Morrissey's lyrics are amazing. The way he gets his ideas across is splendid. I always liked Johnny Marr's playing but I never could get to grips with Morrissey - but that album's really hot...

*He's been watching news on the telly.*

Yes, I am an inveterate news watcher.

*He's been having trouble with his ticklish eyelashes.*

I've got these devilishly ticklish eyelashes. It's hell when I'm being made up for photo sessions.

(Make up artist who's making him up for Smash Hits photo session" Really? I've never met anyone with ticklish eyelashes before!)

*He's released a new single, Hold The Heart.*

It must have been almost a year and a half ago that I wrote it. It was the third song for the LP. I remember thinking I wanted to write a very ballady song, something that people would never think of as a Big Country song, a very direct boy/girl lost and found song.

*And now he's off on tour again!*

I never get tired of the actual physical act of going on stage. I don't think we've ever played as well as a group as we have this year.

But the travelling is a bit of a bind after a while and I do get very homesick.

I'm too old for all that travelling around.

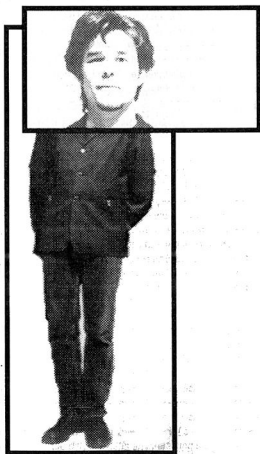
What do you mean I'm not supposed to say that?

I thought I was allowed to say what I liked.

I thought I was in a position of infinite power.

I thought I was blessed with God-like powers...

That's what it says in the guidebook to being a pop star...



Stuart Adamson had it in his mind to do something with guitars that no one else had ever accomplished. He had this sound in his head, trying to get out, striving to produce on a six-string guitar something that most musicians can get by twisting dials on electronic modulators. As the founder of Big Country, Adamson thinks he has the right combination of players and impetus to create a new kind of musical blend, one that joins the folk of his native Scottish home with the Rolling Stones. Many people think he has the right idea. Big Country was one of the most oft reported musical juggernauts of 1983. Along with U2, the Alarm and Dexy's Midnight Runners on the European side and Rank and File in the United States, they were touted as nouveau rock for the flavor of ethnicity they brought to their work. During the recent Grammy awards, Big Country performed live before the national television audience as one of the year's nominees for best new act. The band competed in that category against the Eurythmics, Men Without Hats, and Culture Club for honors.

# Big Country Takes on Our Country

By Bob Andelman

reprinted from *Music*, March 8-21, 1984

"We were quite keyed up about doing it," Adamson said in a recent telephone interview. "It is sort of a big occasion in the music business here..."

The sound in the auditorium where Big Country played that night and in the home TV speakers was "a bit weird," Adamson said, but the overall experience was "great, good fun. Any chance to get up and play is actually what it's all about for us, really."

Adamson's wife of four years was impressed with the company he and the boys kept backstage at the show. "It's not everyday that you have the chance to be in the same room with Michael Jackson, Y'know?"

Despite the other musical luminaries on hand at the show, including Bob Dylan and Stevie Wonder, "we never really got much chance to talk to anyone—I think we were too modest to go up to them—(and) cause we were hanging about to play...After, we were out in the audience waiting to see if we'd won anything or not.

"We obviously didn't," he reminded.

**Were you disappointed when Culture Club won the award?**

"A bit, yeah, but it's expected, I think."

**Why?**

"They sold more records, I think. I'm not really sure. They work in a lighter vein, anyway," Adamson said.

With or without Grammy awards to rest in their trophy cabinets, Big Country has been the subject of enough critical plaudits to fill a roomful of scrapbooks. They have been lauded by fan magazines, news magazine weeklies, and in newspaper reviews of concerts. If you read *Rolling Stone*, you know they have taken the attitude that Big Country is an example of what music should be, while Duran Duran is not.

**What is the big deal?**

That brings us back to that sound in Stuart Adamson's head and a bit of history.

Before Big Country, Adamson spent several years with a British punk band known as the Skids. In vinyl terms, there was a measure of success, the Skids having released three albums on the Virgin label—*Scared To Dance*,

*Days In Europa*, and *The Absolute Game*--featuring songs written by Adamson. A few singles from the Skids made an impression on the English record charts ("Into the Valley," "Masquerade" and "Working for the Yankee Dollar") but left Adamson feeling artistically empty, diluted.

"It was more a sort of rock/punk mixture--people going in all different directions--than the folkie overtones that I have now. I don't think it was as properly focused as (Big Country) is," he said.

After leaving the Skids (the band dissolved a short time later), Adamson met another guitarist, Bruce Watson. The group's official biography describes his as a "biker, barfly and punk aficionado [sic]" who left a job scrubbing nuclear submarines to join what became Big Country.

Left without a working band for a year or more, Adamson and Watson "just messed about, writing songs and stuff, trying to find the right people for the group. I didn't want to rush back into anything; I wanted to take my time and make sure I got it right." That sound in Adamson's head had become a voice of encouragement and confidence...Stick with me kid, you won't go wrong, it seemed to say.

"People need more from music than for it to just be entertainment...(it should be) something that gives them a bit more inspiration," Adamson claimed. It is an assertion also made by the Clash.

Big Country finally made its start: Adamson and Watson added a rhythm section and keyboards and set out on a tour supporting rock ghoul Alice Cooper. That lasted two weeks.

Adamson must have wondered if it was a sound he heard in his ears or a ringing of craziness. He and Watson scrapped the rest of the first Big Country and paused in wait.

Another opportunity beckoned and they took on London studio musicians Tony Butler, a bassist, and drummer Mark Brzezicki.

Butler and Brzezicki brought a successful and accredited commercial background to Big Country, measures that balanced Adamson's ideas and past punk experience with the Skids. As a duo, they played on Pete Townshend's solo projects *Empty Glass* and *All The Best Cowboys Have Chinese Eyes*. They also backed Simon Townshend and Butler contributed to "Back On The Chain Gang" for the Pretenders. "I think the reason they joined us was because they were looking for a place they could express themselves rather than hanging on a producer, rather than having to work to a blueprint, as it were," Adamson said.

Chris Thomas (Paul McCartney, Elton John, Pretenders, Roxy Music) produced the group's initial recording efforts for Britain's Phonogram Records (PolyGram in the United States). "Harvest Home" failed to attract much notice though, as the band's first single.

Big Country was given one more good chance with Steve Lillywhite handling the boards for a few songs. Lillywhite produced *War* for U2 most recently.

"I had been trying to do some stuff with him for ages. We did some shows with the Jam and he came along backstage for a talk and it started from there," Adamson recalled.

Lillywhite's work with XTC and Peter Gabriel were the first things that interested Adamson; after they chatted, he decided the producer "just likes loud drums and big guitars."

"He usually let us get on with it. He never said anything about arrangements or overdubs.

We just checked out as many ideas as we could and it was up to him to say no, we won't do this or alright, do this one, try it out, see how it works," according to Adamson.

With Lillywhite's assistance, Adamson's peculiar sound found its way into the ears of many, many people. "Fields Of Fire" went top 10 in England and the decision to proceed with an album was made with assurance, resulting in *The Crossing*.

"It's mainline rock, still quite rock-oriented," Adamson insisted, discounting all the ethnic aspects his unusual guitar work arouses in American ears.

"I don't know if it's the sounds as much as the melodies. I think the melodies are sort of folk-based. People can hear for themselves that they're being played on bagpipes but they're not, they're played on guitars. I think the melodies may envision that sort of thing in other people's heads."

The traditional sound Big Country mixes with rock in songs like "In A Big Country" is not unlike the fusion Adamson grew up listening to at home, whether it was old Rolling Stones records or Scottish and Irish folk music. "I've always had an affinity for both," he said, "there's never been a dividing line."

Enter the rock press, eager and hungry to build up or tear down the new. Big Country got an enthusiastic thumbs up from critics on both sides of the big water, although Adamson did not actively court their interest. He's not even sure he wants the attention.

"The important thing is to actually be out there doing it. I think if you start believing too much in any of your press, good or bad, then you'll make a mistake," he said. "It's a lack of confidence in yourself. It's never been something I've been particularly worried about. I think you can pick up some pointers as to things."

Big Country's arrival in America has come in four rounds. The first two times were brief appearances at clubs in the northeast, mostly high visibility shots. Then they came back for a frantic 30-date, 7-week tour and the current, even faster-paced 26 gigs in 5 weeks, which may have been designed to capitalize from Grammy publicity. Adamson loves the pace though, saying it will get wearisome "only if you make it seem like work. I think the important thing is to realize music is a communicative form of something, that it isn't like a day job. So we tend to treat every gig as being different and the people there as different, completely, and work on that sort of atmosphere rather than trundle out the same sorts of things, night after night.

"We've been lucky enough to find a place in the hearts of a lot of people here (in America)" Adamson continued, "and that obviously makes you feel at home no matter what country you're in. I think it's quite good to be so (well) received...especially in a country that's vastly different from Scotland."

Previous tours, acclaimed for their unique musicality, were nonetheless roundly booed for equipment troubles. The band was unprepared for the size and quantity of places they played here and their equipment was initially not up to the strain.

But the music won out and Adamson thinks the technical imperfections have been licked. Big Country can again concentrate on his music again, that folksy blend he suggested may even have a touch of American country in it.

Leonard Cohen, Nils Lofgren and the Motown writers of yore make up the mixed bag of songsters Adamson respects. Combine that with his current listening habits: Simple Minds, Echo and the Bunnymen, the Alarm and Cyndi Lauper-- and you get the impression Big Country could go in almost any direction next.

Adamson is composing new material now in expectation of Big Country's upcoming July foray into the recording studio. He'll be hoping to get more of that intriguing sound out of his head and onto the airwaves. Then the band will be back to conquer the big country again.

Everywhere you look these days there's Stuart Adamson's cheery coupon beaming out between the gnarled features of some senior rock legend or other. Big Country are suddenly bigger news than of late, spending the summer supporting the likes of The Rolling Stones on the European leg of their Voodoo Lounge tour, and Jimmy Page and Robert Plant on their 'it's as close as you're going to get to Led Zeppelin' jaunt.

The new album, more than appropriately titled *Why The Long Face?*, is being acclaimed as a return to form for the Scottish rockers, and the current single *You Dreamer* is the strongest contender in ages to emulate the chart success of previous hits like *Chance*, *In A Big Country* and *Fields Of Fire*. Stuart fell in so heavily with Stones Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood, he found himself fulfilling a boyhood dream by joining them on stage.

"They invited me up to sing backing vocals on *Sympathy For The Devil*", he says casually. And did his efforts impress Mr. Jagger? "Well, I would imagine so--he didn't bitch about me anyway, but he was working hard at the time with his voodoo hat on."

Having replaced the Black Crowes as the support act--Keith Richards having liked an advance tape of the album--Big Country found themselves getting the full run of the Stones' luxurious backstage facilities. Stuart gleefully recounts what he rates as the greatest bit of rock and roll decadence he has ever encountered on the road.

# COUNTRY LIFE

COUN  
SOMERVILLE  
MEETS THE BAND  
WHO ARE STORMING BACK  
WITH THE BIG BOYS OF ROCK

"They actually had a snooker roadie out on tour with them! You might think I'm joking, but they had a guy at every show coming into the Voodoo Lounge set, which was all carpets and plants everywhere and a selection of free arcade machines. And he would set up a full size snooker table. Then Ron and Keith would arrive and the guy would have to change into a tuxedo, white shirt, bow tie, the white gloves, and he would replace the balls and beep the score for them!"

A snooker take-on never materialised, being ruled out by the old fashioned fife canniness. "We never challenged them because they looked a bit serious, far too useful," says Stuart, diplomatically.

The back-stage banter was one thing, but out front the band were being exposed to huge crowds. Not exactly a novelty, but this was on a more intense scale.

"That was the best thing because obviously we have played in front of a lot of big crowds, but never a sustained tour like that. I think the smallest gig we played was to 60,000 people at a stadium in Rotterdam, and the ones that were out in fields were just like 100,000 every time."



## Hiccoughs

By contrast the band are eagerly anticipating their own headline tour which brings them to Edinburgh's Usher Hall on October 8, when they can measure the scale of the upturn in their fortunes. Stuart Adamson takes full responsibility for any career hiccoughs, and can pinpoint where things went wrong.

"Well I think the two albums, *Peace In Our Time* and *No Place Like Home*, weren't the records I would ideally have wanted to make. There were a lot of politics going on at the record company and somebody suggested using this producer, and let's try it this way and I kind of went along with it, and you never know unless you try these things but in hindsight I shouldn't have agreed."

Now Big Country are producing themselves again and reaping the benefits, returning to the gruff, tough but tender sound which has served them so well over the past twelve years. Tipping the song *You Dreamer* for the top finds him refusing to speculate on adding to the tally of hits.

"Singles are a bit like having kids— you pat them on the head and send them out into the world and hope that they are going to do well.

"If they come back successful then great, but if not you still love them anyway because they are your kids."

Stuart and his wife Sandra have moved back to Dunfermline after a lengthy sojourn in Orlando, Florida, where they also have a home. So was it the lure of the hot Scottish summers, or the need to frequent East End Park to make sure the First Division pacesetters don't blow it at the final hurdle again which called them back to Fife?

"We'd been looking at a couple of pubs before we moved away, and one became available so we jumped at it. We want to keep it very traditional because it's actually right in the centre of town. It's in the conservation area of Dunfermline and they're really keen on keeping things as they are."

Can it therefore be assumed that there will not be any rock memorabilia plastered around the place or a triangle on the pool table 'as used by Ronnie and Keith from the Rolling Stones'?

"No, no, no—no danger," he protests, "Maybe some stuff upstairs, but, no, even then I don't think so."

For a man who has revitalised his career by returning to his traditional style, that comes as no great surprise.



Tired of that same old mundane dinner fare?

Want a little taste of the old country?

Well, break out those pots and pans as

AOU presents a timeless culinary classic

# Haggis



This Scottish dish which Robert Burns revered is still made in Scotland. Although the recipe is not what one might call an everyday one, surely it must have a place in any collection of Scottish recipes.

1 cup oatmeal

1 **BEEF LIVER**

1 **BEEF HEART**

1 cloned sheep (optional)

2 finely chopped onions

Salt

Black pepper

Water

One sturdy plastic bag which can be boiled (The old recipe calls for a sheep stomach bag--can you see the butcher's face?)

Toast the oatmeal in a very low oven until it is crisp. Wash the **BEEF LIVER** and **BEEF HEART** and cover with water; bring to a boil and simmer for two hours. Cut away all surplus gristle and put through grinder with the suet and onions (the latter may also be chopped instead). Season highly with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Add a little of the water the **BEEF LIVER** and **BEEF HEART** were cooked in, enough to make the mixture soft but still sticking well together when the oatmeal is added. Stuff the mixture into the plastic bag, leaving it a little more than half-full, because the mix will swell with cooking. Sew up the end of the bag firmly and place in a large pan of hot water. As soon as the bag begins to swell, prick all over with a fine needle to prevent bursting. Boil slowly in this uncovered pan for about three hours. Serve very hot with creamed potatoes and rutabagas. For added excitement, you might laugh psychotically at random intervals while your guests partake of this scrumptious dish.

I want to take a moment here to acknowledge that over the months and years that I've done AOU, I've made many friends and many more acquaintances. I've also, through laziness or forgetfulness or some other form of thoughtlessness, alienated some of those people. Maybe you wrote and I never responded. Maybe you ordered a T-shirt and it took forever. Maybe you had a truly good idea and let me in on it expecting action and were met with indifference or some form of apathy...

Well, it's certainly about time I addressed this and said, very sincerely, I deeply apologize to each and every subscriber that ever had any reason to be disappointed in me, regardless of how small a matter it was.

There are people reading this (hopefully, that is) that have, at one time or another, been among my finest friends. There are, of course, others who I've never heard from except a check in the mail after sending me an SASE with a brief note requesting info. Even those latter folks deserve an apology for AOU not being on time consistently. But to those who I have been very close to, I apologize if I haven't always been as committed as I should have been. I apologize for not always responding, or responding in either a vague or untimely fashion. I'm sure many of you are thinking "What the hell is he on about?!" In response, no, I'm not on Prozac now.

I simply feel that while I'm trying to address any oversights, of any nature, personally to those I feel responsible to, I also need to extend a general apology to all subscribers. Please, if I've done anything that's irritated or upset you - the reader - personally, I encourage you to bring it to my attention and, I promise, I *will* address it.

While it is difficult to keep track of things with a fanzine running on close to 100 people, I accepted the responsibility and there's no excuse for not doing my best to respond to any inquiry, whether it be a question or an order or whatever.

With that having been said, I really hope you'll enjoy the last two issues of the Me versions of AOU! I'm trying to pack 'em full of decent meaty BC articles. Anyone who wants to contribute any input towards the final issue is encouraged to send it on - be it an article, essay, photo, or maybe just a "goodbye" message to a BC brother or sister, or the congregation as a whole. Maybe you'd like to share with us some personal info on yourself - hobbies, favorite bands other than BC, first or most vivid BC memory, etc.? Feel free!

I'll let everyone know right now up front that while I'm not going to bother Ian or Jan for quite awhile (if ever again), you can certainly feel welcome to write after the whole thing's over. I may not have any answers, but I don't mind being asked.

To those of you who invested in our Chronicle Discs, I hope the subsequent UK releases don't leave you feeling disappointed and I do apologize for never getting around to CD #4, but I just felt PolyGram UK was going to eventually release enough material to make it a moot point, so I didn't bother. CDs 1 & 2 kicked ass, didn't they?! Still do in my book!

You wouldn't believe how many responses from the WTLF album listing, etc. I'm getting from newcomers now that I'm closing AOU's doors. While I explain to them that they will get 2 back issues and two new issues, I've only had two brave souls subscribe in about 4 months!

Well, that's about it for this first-to-last edition of AOU! I hope you enjoy it thoroughly and I hope it *still* gets better & better, right up to the very last issue!

Until next time -



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