

Odin Dragonfly

With the release of 'Offerings' (see reviews) three launch gigs in York, London and Wolverhampton took place. **Roger Newport** reports:

Odin Dragonfly - Offerings Tour

The first gig at Fibbers in York, which was preceded by an impressive publicity campaign. Total Rock Radio played 'Maggie' on Jerry Ewing's 'Fat Man In A Bath Tub' show and this was followed up a week later with a lengthy interview with Heather on his 'Metal Lunchbox' show, which also featured the playing of both MA's 'Black Rain' and Odin Dragonfly's version of 'Caught In A Fold' - quite an achievement on what is essentially a heavy rock show. Another interview with Heather was broadcast the next day on Paul Franks' Drivetime show on BBC Radio WM. Further radio plays took place on Wolverhampton City Radio and York's own Minster Radio. It wasn't just radioactivity either, as York's evening paper, 'The Press', carried a comprehensive full-colour interview with Heather and Angela on the day of the York gig. I must say, I was very impressed how they'd managed to organise such good coverage and it was certainly encouraging to hear and see some good quality publicity both on the tour and the album.

Friday 21st August saw the first of the 'Offerings' tour. Travelling with the esteemed editor of this veritable publication, Mr Bloom, our journey to York was plagued by Bank Holiday traffic but we still arrived in time for the soundcheck. Both Heather and Angela maintain that they are far more nervous about performing as Odin Dragonfly than they are as members of Mostly Autumn but it certainly didn't show on the run up to the gig. I guess by now they've got used to doing their own thing without the safety blanket of their MA colleagues.

Following support from Sarah Dean and her unique harp-based performance (well worth checking out if you get chance), and Aimie J Ryan, Odin Dragonfly took to the stage. As always the performance was spot on and peppered with much humorous banter. So much banter in fact that they ran out of time and had to drop a song from the set! However, nobody seemed too upset as the whole evening was essentially a celebration, with various family members and fellow Mostlies Bryan, Livvy, Andy Smith and Chris Johnson all there to show their support. In fact the only slight hitch was that Heather was without a 12-string guitar (which she uses on 'Yellow Time' and 'Given Time') as it was out on loan. So she made do with a normal 6-string. Nobody seemed to mind though and both those songs sounded just fine.

Saturday brought the trek down to the Fly in London. A strange quirk of fate meant that somehow a substitute 12-string was acquired, although unfortunately there wasn't sufficient time to set it up properly to be used at the gig (12-string guitars are more physically demanding to play than their 6-string counterparts and can be very uncomfortable on the hands if not carefully set-up).

I'm always surprised at how time seems to fly by and although we arrived mid-afternoon, by the time everything was set-up and Heather

and Angela had done their soundcheck there was only just about time to rush out for a quick bite to eat before they had to rush back in time to catch Anne-Marie Helder's support slot, before they themselves took to the stage in front of an audience that included Classic Rock magazine's Jerry Ewing. This time they managed to get through the whole of 'Offerings' without needing to drop anything, playing it in its album sequence in what they joked as "a 70s prog style"! As always the gig was peppered with telling of humorous tales in between songs, causing Angela to remark that if they behaved like that in the very serious Mostly Autumn then they would be severely told off by a certain Mr Josh! Hmm, "serious" MA? Clearly they must have forgotten about the most recent gig MA did at the Springhead in Hull - but hey, that's another story! Even Angela's husband, the legendary 'McKinty' unintentionally joined in the hilarity when he switched on a hand-held fan to try and cool himself down as he sat backstage. Before the gig started, the fan motor noise hadn't been audible above the audience banter but when switched on in the middle of a song the girls suddenly found themselves accompanied by a loud buzzing noise! All in all, the evening was a great success and Heather and Angela spent plenty of times afterwards signing CDs and chatting to fans.

By contrast to The Fly, Wolverhampton's Little Civic is a much more spacious venue with proper dressing rooms (no need to use restaurant loos to put on make-up here!) We arrived in plenty of time to get set-up and sound-checked. Perhaps

something people don't necessarily realise, soundchecks are as much for the sound engineer to get used to the set. Odin Dragonfly's songs are obviously much simpler in their instrumentation than Mostly Autumn's but in a live situation in order to reproduce something similar to the multi-tracked flute parts on 'Witch's Promise', delay effects have to be added by the sound engineer at the appropriate time. The Little Civic's mixing desk is somewhat basic but after a couple of runs through the sound engineer managed to coax the necessary effects from the board with such gusto that during the gig both girls had trouble not bursting into laughter when they were suddenly engulfed in whirling multiple flute sounds from all directions!

Support was once again provided by Anne-Marie Helder who managed to get through her whole set without standing on her guitar lead and pulling it out (as she had done the night before!) Anne-Marie has a great voice and is well worth checking out if you have the chance.

Odin Dragonfly once again played the whole of 'Offerings' in order, interspersed with the now customary chat and anecdotes. If anything they performed even better than the night before in London. After some preparatory work earlier in the day by McKinty and myself, the 12-string was finally in a suitable state for Heather to play and she used it to good effect on 'Given Time.'

Once finished Heather, Angela and Anne-Marie once again spent a great deal of time signing CDs



and talking with fans. So long in fact that the staff at the venue seemed genuinely bemused by the fact that people were hanging around for so long. It's to the Little Civic's credit that, unlike so many venues, they do not rush to get people out of the door once a show is over. Eventually of course everyone did leave and it was time to pack up and leave. Fortunately with just equipment for two people, this is a much quicker process than with Mostly Autumn.

And so the tour came to an end. It was as enjoyable as ever and both Heather and Angela were seemed genuinely surprised at the level of interest, something that was reflected in healthy interest at the merchandise stall (manned by our illustrious editor at London and Wolverhampton and by the legendary 'Peter The Great' at York).

Personally, I think Heather and Angela should be immensely proud of what they've achieved so far with Odin Dragonfly. 'Offerings' may have had a long and protracted birth but it is a delightful album that does them huge credit. Their shows too are always hugely enjoyable. However, I'm equally impressed by their determination and also by how they have managed to organise and promote themselves with very little resource.

With a new Mostly Autumn album anticipated for next year, along no doubt with an accompanying tour, Odin Dragonfly's plans have yet to be finalised. However, when they do go out on the road again I shall most certainly be there!

Andrew Lock also reports on the launch gigs: Apart from the two sets at the convention this was our first Odin Dragonfly gig and a corker it was as well. Even better when quite a while after booking tickets I noticed the Monday after was a Bank Holiday.

After finding somewhere to park only a couple of hundred yards away we made our way to the venue (great bonus the sound check tinkering through an open window) where first business (yes even before a pint!) a couple of tickets for the December Mostly Autumn show just down the road, and then a pint. Joined the queue with about 15 minutes till opening just in case like Cox's Yard the venue had no stage (fortunately it had) and made our way to the front of the stage first up as support Anne-Marie Helder very impressive good songs powerfully performed I just got into Karnataka in time to see the band split up so never got to see Anne with Karnataka but will try to see her again as a solo artist or in a band set up soon. She definitely has the Odin Dragonfly sense of fun and humour and made a perfect support. Would be a great addition to the next convention line-up.

On to Odin Dragonfly who of course were superb and played Offerings complete and I believe in album order, but of course with there fun and games and very funny comedy double act the running time went from 48 minutes to about 70 minutes. Every track was a gem with the standouts for me 'This Game', 'Magpie', 'Witches Promise' and 'Waiting For The Snow.' As usual we were treated very well after the show and Heather, Angela and Anne happily signed our CDs and chatted to us. A big thank you to all three of you and all involved in the show.



Before the last of the three Odin Dragonfly launch gigs I spoke with Angela. Not as you might think about Odin Dragonfly but about her session work outside of Mostly Autumn. The interview brought up many fascinating nuggets of info and once you have read through it I am sure it will also whet the appetite for Angela's future plans. The first question I put to Angela was in reference to one of her compositions, 'Meridon's Caravan' that has yet to be released. Those of you who devour the magazine from cover to cover will have read about this in the last issue as fact number 6 in our ongoing series of 333! (page 19) Read on...

Meridon's Caravan and Which Wood? Were written in the same week as we were just preparing to go out again with Blackmore's Night. I think we'd done the first stint following the York show, and then we came back and wanted to put a nice set together as they were taking us out to Germany. We were very conscious of the fact that we were not short of material but short of original acoustic stuff. We were re-arranging Mostly Autumn stuff and playing some traditional jigs but I felt it was time for me to write some original stuff for that arrangement and ensemble of acoustics, and for Heather and I.

Lots of mysterious things were happening at that time and Heather and little Chris were sharing a house and there was lots of things going bump in the night and shadows and things and at Bryan's house. I think it was coming to winter. A very strange time. A few things happened to me but they were in no way sinister. They were just mysterious and unexplained. One of them was that I'd set myself the task of sitting down and actually writing a few tunes out. I went upstairs and I don't usually play upstairs. But for some reason I had gone upstairs and I sat on the bed and I just had my flute and my manuscript book. I was finding it hard to... I suppose you would say 'chase the muse' really. I couldn't focus and was finding other things to do and I decided to get up and go to the bathroom and I couldn't get out! There isn't a lock on the bedroom door but I couldn't get out of the bedroom. I don't think I panicked I just thought something is telling

me to sit down and get on with this.

So I sat down and about forty minutes later I had written what was Which Wood? The two parts of the jig and the skeleton of what would become Meridon's Caravan. Then I thought I really do need to go to the bathroom and I got up and opened the door, I went out into the hallway and on my way to the bathroom it just struck me that I managed to open the door that time. If I had gone the first time I would probably have found something to do in the bathroom and never got round to sitting and writing those two tunes. It was as if something was trapping me in there and saying, "come on girl, sit down and focus!" So it was quite mysterious and out came the tunes. Who knows where they come from?

So why haven't you recorded it?

I probably will soon. Obviously Offerings has been our main focus this year and fitting that around the Mostly Autumn stuff. I think for both Heather and myself the next projects to fit in around Mostly Autumn commitments, babies and trips round the world are solo ones. If I say this now I will be committing myself so around nursing I would like to record a few pieces that haven't been recorded yet. Meridon's Caravan was written as a recorder duet, accompanied by guitar and specifically for Heather and Bryan and myself.

[Editors comment: I am the proud owner of a recording of this piece that was filmed during my fortieth birthday celebrations, which is what made me aware of it, and before you ask- No I won't bootleg it!]



Heather had loaned me a book called Meridon, shame I can't remember the author! [Editors comment: Philippa Gregory, illustrated here] It's about a girl who joins the band of gypsies and had this really romantic lifestyle of going around the caravans and various things happen to this gypsy girl Meridon. But it was the atmosphere of travelling round, and the Blackmore's Night stuff made us feel like that. Not so much the 'living out of a suitcase sales rep' travelling round but much more the gypsy 'coming in to town and playing your instruments and playing for your supper' kind of thing. We managed to romanticise it to get us through the tough times.

"I think the next project to fit in around Mostly Autumn is a solo one"

You played that song on the tour with Blackmore's Night?

That's right. So that's what that is really about for me. As much as an instrumental piece can be about anything. That was inspired by that lifestyle and Meridon's Caravan.

Let's talk about the sessions you have done. A few bits and bobs outside of Mostly Autumn. I have yeah.

Now this Manning...
Guy Manning.

You did some stuff on a couple of his albums. Was that because it was Cyclops...

Yeah early days, we were label buddies and he'd obviously heard my stuff with Mostly Autumn and I don't think it does anyone any harm to work with other people and get crossover audiences and hopefully a few guys checked us out on the back of that and vice versa. I sort of advertised the fact that I was doing that and hopefully some of the Mostly Autumn fans checked out Guy's work. After that Mostly Autumn were pretty constantly out there gigging so unfortunately I was unable to play on his later stuff. But the stuff I did do I really enjoyed. That was done in Guy's home studio. He has a really excellent set up and does everything himself. So I spent a day in his studio. He had a very clear idea of the sound he wanted and the stuff he wanted me to play and it was a real pleasure to play, he is very professional.

You also appeared on the Gabriel album, which most of Mostly Autumn also did...

Marc (Atkinson) posted me a tape (which shows how long ago that was) that had an instrumental arrangement of Motherlove, which is a beautiful piece of music and it was an absolute pleasure to play on that for him.

Probably the weirdest session you have done is with Thijs Van Leer. Weird because he is also a flautist. To invite another flautist seemed odd... what did you think of that?

That was an absolute turning the corner and 'pinch yourself to see if it's real' moment. We had just come off stage as Odin Dragonfly, supporting Focus at Fibbers. It was very early days for the duo in 2005 and we were going out supporting people, just picking up an audience and experience. And he literally came over, and you have to bear in mind there is Ian Anderson and James Galway and Thijs Van Leer. And for me in contemporary flute playing they have really got it. And one of my top three has just walked over and said something along the lines of "would you like to play? I have a day off in York tomorrow, any chance of getting together and doing some playing?" Of course I was bowled over by this and practically speechless and missed the first half of the Focus set- in Fibbers office with the phone book out, desperately trying to find some studio time and an engineer. I met him at the studio the next day and we went into Imp Hut, a great local studio. I managed to get an engineer (John Greatwood) out of bed early, which is no mean feat I'll tell you! It was so last minute; the keys for the studio were left at a guitar shop around the corner and we threw this session together. He had a song that he wanted me to sing about his father that his wife had actually written the words for, 'Eddie'. It was on my Myspace for a while. I sort of insisted to him that I'm a flute player not a lead singer but he was saying "no I heard you sing last night, I want you to sing", and I'm saying "sorry I think you have got the wrong Dragonfly!" We did that, kind of rushed through it because I wanted to play flute and then I did a flute improvisation with Thijs Van Leer. Literally the pair of us stood around the mic and he said, "I will play for a few bars then you play for a few bars and...let's just play" and all day I was thinking sooner or later I'm going to wake up in my cornflakes! He had a lot of really nice things to say about my playing, which built my confidence up loads

and I learnt a lot from him that day as well in terms of improvisation. Because coming from a classical background via folk into rock I hadn't really done any improvisation at all. He grabbed hold of my piano and started jamming some chords out that he wanted to play over it was very crazy. And we played some flute over that. I then had to go home and teach because I couldn't get hold of my pupil to cancel the lessons and had to make my apologies and went home and taught for an hour: Came back into town and the engineer, Johnny, had printed up a label and got us a CD each and said "there was evidence that I haven't been dreaming and I had spent the day recording with Thijs van Leer."

You say he taught you about improvisation. How do you learn that? I always thought it was just a knack you either have or you haven't.

I think that's probably true to a certain extent but I think it's about identifying patterns and it is difficult. But he made me relaxed and that's certainly the thing I pass-on to my students now. You have to have feel and relax into what you are doing and believe in what you are playing and then it will come. If you have done the technical ground work, the scales and arpeggios, you have got it

"I did a flute improvisation with Thijs Van Leer and all day I was thinking sooner or later I'm going to wake up in my cornflakes!"

there and then you just need to relax and let the music come out of you. He helped me to do that because I was less than relaxed at the start of the day, and he helped me to do that and by the end of the day I was making it all up as I was going along. It was great.

That is definitely the thing with classical musicians I find. They generally can't improvise because they are just taught to read, and play what is there.

Yeah but fortunately now with the grades system they are incorporating that into musicianship and recognise that is a quality and skill that a musician should have, and shouldn't be allowed to get to the stage they do on paper without moving into that area. I think they call it practical musicianship.

Are there any other sessions you have done?

I played on Julia Jenkins album. Again I was really privileged to play on that. It was a really special song that she had asked me to play on. I was hoping to do some work with Mermaid Kiss but I can only spread myself so thinly and that hasn't as yet come about. I do like to be busy but ultimately I have to let people down sometimes because my first commitment is to Mostly Autumn, then to the duo, and then I have to get my solo stuff out as well: And my classical playing and my teaching, and being a mum!

Potentially the solo stuff is a long way down the line. Do you have any vision as to what it will be like?

It's really clearly laid out for me now. It will be a very varied thing to reflect my musical life and that is really varied. I would love to produce an album that is me and piano but that would take away from everything else though. It would take a way from my instrumental writing and playing. And if it is going to be an Angela Gordon album it is going to have to feature some recorders and some renaissance influenced stuff and some classical flute stuff and a little bit of the Celtic stuff.

Will it be a true solo album or will you get others to contribute?

I will probably get other people in to do guest appearances but at this stage I am just writing and arranging what I am going to do. I can't imagine producing an album without having Heather on it somewhere. She will certainly be involved in helping me with my vocals as all my best vocal performances have been coached by Heather. It would be foolish for me to think I could step into a studio without...

Use her as a vocal producer?

Yeah probably, something like that definitely because she just brings out the best in me. The vocal performances on Offerings that I am happiest with are the ones when she has sat in the control booth, and as you say 'vocal produced', so she will definitely be involved with that. Then there are other people I would really like to work with, but it's early days yet. I've got a lot of work to do first. I will put everything I can into it and if I feel it needs starting up...

