

The gypsy king

Four disc box set recasts Traffic's often overlooked founding member as a musician and songwriter who was always ahead of the curve. **By Mark Blake.**

Jim Capaldi

★★★★★

Dear Mr Fantasy: The Jim Capaldi Story

IN TRAFFIC'S song Rock 'N' Roll Stew, Jim Capaldi hymns the drudgery of nights spent in Transit vans and on long-haul flights to Los Angeles, while accepting that this is the life he has chosen: "I don't care, it's where I'm from, I'm on the road again..." Traffic split up in 1974, but for Capaldi, their then 30-year-old drummer, sometime vocalist and prime lyricist, the trip was far from over.

As a solo artist Capaldi may not have matched the success of Traffic, but *Dear Mr Fantasy* showcases a songwriter whose talent was disproportionate to his sales or public profile. The music rolls through pop, funk, rock, psychedelia, ballads and soul, united by an impeccable songcraft, which stayed intact 'til Capaldi's death in 2005.

Nicola James Capaldi came from a half-Italian family and grew up in Worcestershire. The former altar boy began playing in Birmingham nightclubs at 14. This collection begins with his debut single, 1964's *Daydreaming Of You*, a buoyant beat-pop number made with The Hellions, a group that included future Traffic guitarist Dave Mason. Capaldi tried LSD for the first time the following year, and the aftershocks were audible on 1966's *Pretty Colours*, by which time The Hellions had become Deep Feeling. "We were one foot in the future," Capaldi told MOJO's Andrew Male for the sleeve notes. "We were already acid rock."

This notion of Capaldi as a musician always ahead of the curve endures from that point. When Deep Feeling split, Capaldi formed Traffic in '67 with Mason, multi-instrumentalist Chris Wood and 19-year-old vocalist Steve Winwood. Capaldi's role seemed to be part older brother, part factory foreman, as he "sweated his beard off to get Traffic moving". The group lived in a cottage in the Berkshire Downs, where Capaldi crafted mystical, hallucinatory lyrics to *Dear Mr Fantasy* and *40,000 Headmen*. The music sounded as if it was made in a haze of illegal substances but contained vivid flashes of the soul, rhythm and blues and Latin beats Capaldi had heard as a teenager in the clubs. Traffic were also inquisitive about new styles. A reggae version of *40,000 Headmen* here flags up Capaldi's friendship with a then unknown Bob Marley and his early passion for Jamaican music.

In late '71, Winwood fell ill and Traffic came off the road to let him recuperate. Capaldi booked into Alabama's Muscle Shoals studio to make most of his first solo album, '72's *Oh How We Danced*. Helped by the rest of Traffic and their regular session players including Ghanaian percussionist Reebop Kwaku Baah, its soulful blues, funk and ballads helped fill a Traffic-shaped hole. Pete Townshend is quoted in the box set's sleeve notes, describing Capaldi as "a robust Yorkshire farmer crossed with a Kentish gypsy". This hippy prizefighter image was often misleading. Capaldi sings a sweetly sentimental lyric on *Oh How We Danced*'s *Open Your Heart*, one of this set's many romantic ballads; in '75 his cover of The Everly Brothers' weepy *Love Hurts* was a solo hit.

Traffic returned for '73's *Shoot Out At The Fantasy Factory*, but a year later, Winwood walked out and they split up for the best part of the next 20 years. Capaldi joined Chris Wood and Island Records' Chris Blackwell on a jolly to Brazil, and moved there permanently for several



Dear Mr Fantasy
THE JIM CAPALDI STORY

FACT SHEET

- Available as four discs covering the years 1964 to 2004.
- Includes songs by Jim Capaldi's pre-Traffic groups, Traffic, solo material and previously unreleased demos.
- Guest musicians include Steve Winwood, Eric Clapton, George Harrison, Paul Kossoff, Paul Weller and Dave Mason.

Key Tracks

- Dear Mr Fantasy
- 40,000 Headmen
- You And Me

years after meeting his future wife, Aninha Campos. The country's indigenous music, its dazzling football teams and grim social problems inspired Capaldi. His next solo set, *Whale Meat Again*, was a much better record than its punning title suggests. The title track's eco-conscious lyric – "His meat's in your make-up, his flesh is on your lips" – showed a rock lyricist with more to write about than the minutiae of tour-bus life. 1975's *Short Cut Draw Blood* kept standards high, and included *Boy With A Problem*, a cautionary message to a drug-addicted Chris Wood.

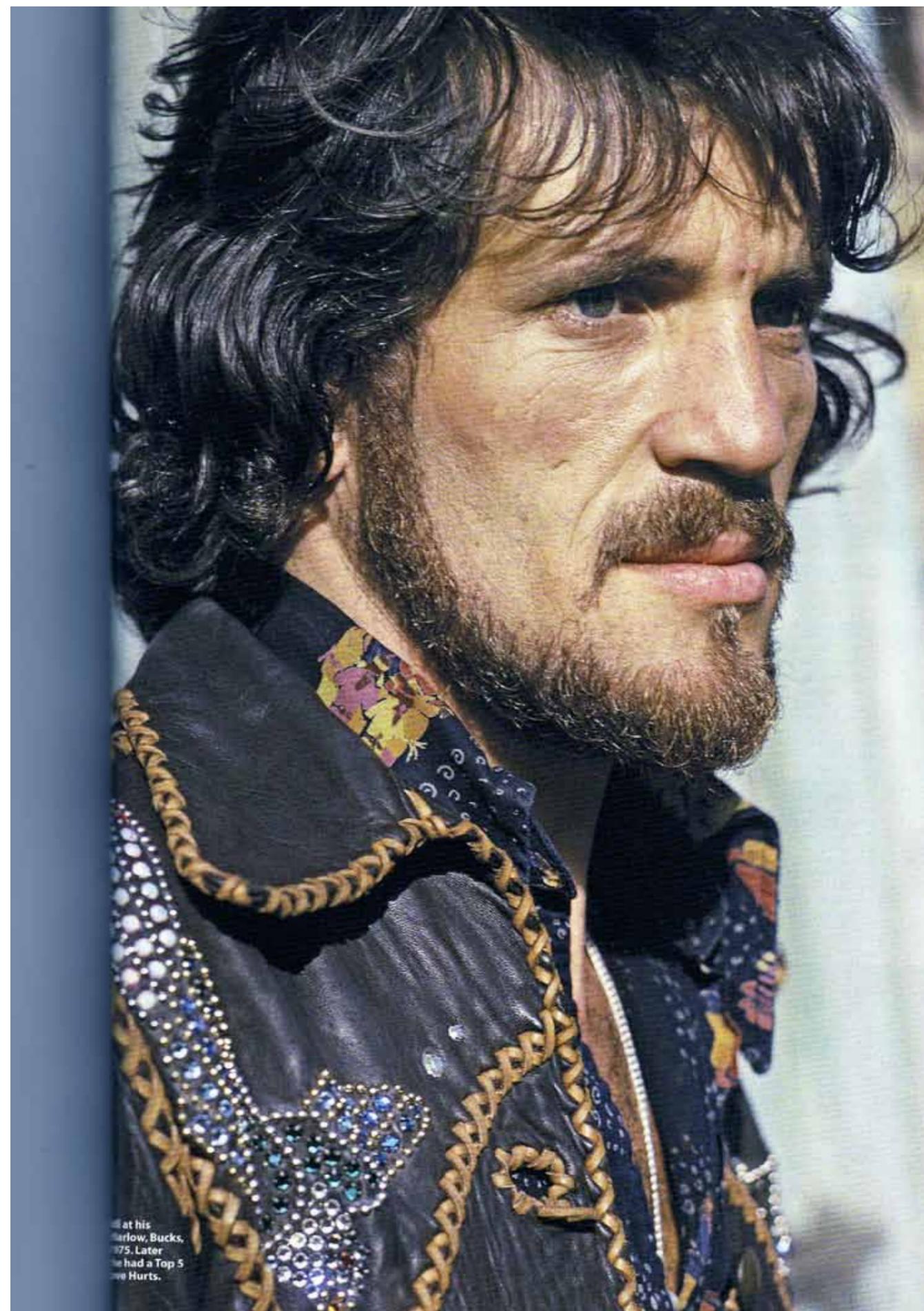
Winwood and Free guitarist Paul Kossoff and were among the players on 1978's *The Contender* (titled *Daughter Of The Night* in the US), and Kossoff features on a regal ballad, *You And Me*, which is among this collection's best rarities. But by end of the decade, Capaldi faced the same dilemma as Winwood and most of their contemporaries: how to remain current in a changing musical climate. On 1979's *Electric Nights*, the following year's *The Sweet Smell Of... Success* and '81's *Let Thunder Cr* Capaldi tried to write soft-rock hits. His resonant voice compensates for the strip-club sax solo on *Wild Geese* (from the soundtrack to the Roger Moore action movie of that name), but the song sounds like a period piece.

In the '80s, a still boyish looking Winwood could be moulded for MTV. Capaldi was a harder sell. Back from Brazil, and signed to Don Arden's Jet Records label, he collaborated with Winwood on '83's *Fierce Heart*, achieving a US hit with *That's Love*. But he rode out the rest of the decade with Carlos Santana and Eric Clapton helping out on '84's easily forgotten *One Man Mission* and '88's *Some Come Running*. *Gifts Of Unknown Things* (1983) is one of a handful of tracks from the era that stands out here. Inspired by new age author Lyall Watson's book, it taps into Capaldi's fascination with the ocean and Mother Nature, and is a lustrous pearl in a sea of synthesizers and programmed drums.

Traffic reunited for a short-lived album and tour in the mid-'90s, while the Capaldi co-write *Love Will Keep Us Alive* (a live version is featured here) became a radio hit for the re-formed Eagles. But it wasn't until 2001 that he made another solo record. George Harrison and Steve Winwood's names were flashed on the cover of *Living On The Outside* while Traffic fan Paul Weller played guitar on a rousing *Standing In My Light*.

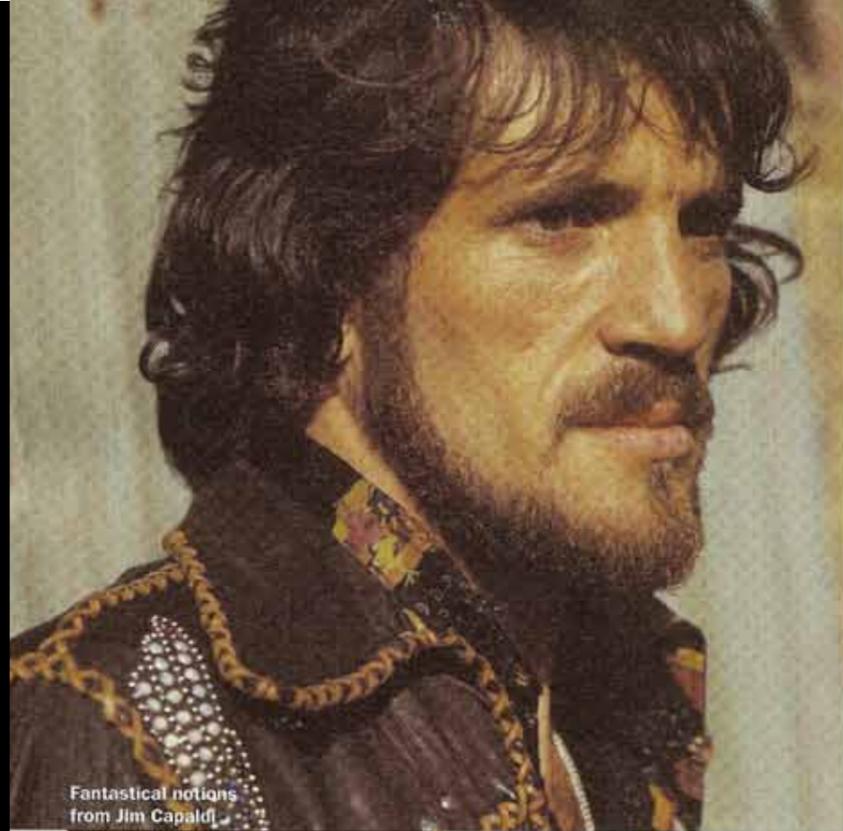
Most of the final disc is given over to previously unreleased demos that suggest Capaldi had another fine album in him, with one mysterious song, *The Time Of Cholera*, echoing the spectral sound of Traffic's *John Barleycorn Must Die*. By the time he released his final studio album, 2004's *Poor Boy Blue*, Capaldi had been diagnosed with stomach cancer. One song on that record, *Bright Fighter*, was dedicated to singer Mike Patto, who'd died tragically young from cancer in 1979. That same year, Capaldi had recorded *Hotel Blues*, a satirical salute to the pitfalls of a touring muso's life, which had the chorus line, "If I don't die on-stage I'll die in this hotel room."

In reality, Capaldi had long since discovered a calmer life away from Transits and airport check-ins, living in a medieval priory with Aninha and their two daughters. He died in a London hospital on January 28, 2005. Two years later, Winwood, Townshend and Weller were among the performers at a tribute concert in his honour. The wealth of great songs they had to choose from reinforces Weller's description of Jim Capaldi as one of music's great "unsung heroes". Long overdue, *Dear Mr Fantasy* corrects that oversight and truly sings his praises.



at his Marlow, Bucks, 1975. Later he had a Top 5 Love Hurts.

Vibeke Dahl



Fantastical notions from Jim Capaldi

Jim Capaldi
Dear Mr Fantasy

★★★★★
UMC/Island 5333997 (4-CD)

Traffic oddly light on epic four-disc career Journey

Few could be more deserving of the lavish box set treatment than Jim Capaldi, best known as Traffic's drummer, but also a hyperactive lyricist, collaborator, solo artist and environmental campaigner. This glowing four-disc tribute, overseen by widow Aninha, strives to present a balanced picture of Capaldi's career, from early 60s beat group origins to rehearsing for Traffic's 2004 induction into the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame, the year before Capaldi succumbed to stomach cancer.

Born in 1944 to Italian immigrant parents in Evesham, Worcester, the teenage Capaldi played drums in local bands, forming The Helions with future Traffic guitarist Dave Mason in 1963 (and releasing three unsuccessful singles, here represented by 1965's *Daydreaming Of You*). The struggling band changed their name to The Revolution in 1966, then the psychedelised Deep Feeling (both given a track apiece).

Named by Capaldi, Traffic stemmed from early 1967 jam sessions at Birmingham's Elbow Room club between Mason, Steve Winwood and flute-sax maestro Chris Wood; the four famously retired to a Berkshire cottage to write their debut album, *Mr Fantasy*. They announced themselves to the world with the non-album *Paper Sun* which, like much of the LP, Capaldi had a heavy hand in writing, but they're here represented by the ethereal *Dealer* and epic title track, while 40,000 *Headmen* and otherwise omitted second album's *Pearly Queen* come from 1973's *Eric Clapton And Friends* concert.

1970's landmark *John Barleycorn Must Die* is totally ignored in favour of 1971's *Low Spark Of High Heeled Boys*, and that's it for this wonderful band until a track from 1994's one-off reunion with Winwood on *Far*

from *Home* (Wood having died in 1983).

The rest is a hefty trawl through Capaldi's solo albums, beginning on fine, funky form with 1972's *Oh How We Danced*, continuing with 1974's *Whale Meat Again* (with the unmistakable Muscle Shoals rhythm section smouldering) and 1975's *Short Cut Draw Blood*, featuring Capaldi's Top 10 revamp of The Everly Brothers' *Love Hurts*. But, as *Disc Two* proceeds, songs fall into that familiar pattern, where 60s-spawned artists (even Winwood) mined the lucrative US AOR market, awash with booming drums draped in soft-focus electric pianos.

Capaldi made several albums during this time, characterised by 1981's *Let The Thunder Cry*, rendering *Disc Three* the most dated-sounding disc. Even from the windswept bombast of 1988's *Some Come Running*, however, he's joined by Clapton and George Harrison for a heartfelt take on Parliament's moving racial statement *Oh Lord, Why Lord*, showing that Capaldi's soul could still blaze beneath the sheen.

In the mid-70s, Capaldi married Brazilian-born Aninha, moving to Brazil. As British folklore and world music imbued his earlier work, the country and its culture manifested in tracks such as *Favella Music* (along with ill-fitting disco excursions), while daughters Tabitha and Talleleulah were both blessed with delicate ballads included here. Capaldi's last years saw him enjoying reverence from his peers, with 12th solo album *Living On The Outside* featuring the likes of George Harrison, Paul Weller, Gary Moore and Winwood. Capaldi grew particularly close to Harrison, collaborating on *Love's Got A Hold*, recording *Song For George* after the former Beatles' death in 2001.

Capaldi's rare compassion and lust for life could still infiltrate even the mellowest AOR ballad on this beautifully put together labour of love which, like its subject, doesn't take the easy route. But, even in this context, more Traffic, like his time-stopping *No Face, No Name, No Number*, diverted in this direction would have got the balance spot on. *Kris Needs*



Journey, Welch's return is no disappointment. She's made the odd guest appearance in between (and David Rawlings' 2009 album *A Friend Of A Friend* was a collaborative effort, albeit with their usual roles reversed). Here Welch's name is above the title, but *The Harrow & The Harvest* is undoubtedly the apotheosis of her and Rawlings' long-standing partnership. All 10 new songs are co-written and performed just by the two of them, with Rawlings handling the production.

Welch has described the record as "10 different kinds of sad" but, like all the best sad songs, they're also incredibly uplifting. Reminiscent of her striking 1996 debut, *Revival*, this is pure, unadulterated traditional country music, as once played by The Carter Family or Delmore Brothers. There's nothing alternative about this sombre, simple and respectful album, with Welch and Rawlings singing and playing in perfect harmony. Yet it's no contradiction to describe the sound as rough and ragged. The way Welch and Rawlings have assimilated the old songs and embody classic ballad singing, you'd think the material was written back in the 30s. The only giveaway is a lack of surface scratches. There's no need to highlight any song, each one is equally exquisite. *Mick Houghton*

The Wombles
Remember You're A Womble

★★★★★
Dramatico DRAMCD 0065
Going underground overground

There was a time when Mike Batt was sick of The Wombles, describing the lovable critters as an albatross around his neck distracting from the rest of his long career in music. He's over that now, though, reconciled with his past to the point of reissuing five of the band's albums on his own label this month.

This was one of three long-players to reach the Top 20 in 1974, the same year The Wombles sold more singles than any other act – arguably because, beyond the novelty of the five-minute children's TV show that spawned them, they were a pretty good group. Shorn of the lyrics about



Jim Capaldi

Dear Mr Fantasy UNIVERSAL

Four-CD retrospective of Traffic's funky drummer, and one of the finest songwriters of his generation.

As cosmic conscience and rhythmic powerhouse with Traffic, Jim Capaldi was one of the most charismatic figures in 60s pop, a piratical purveyor of good vibes held in such high regard that a tribute concert in the drummer's honour at the Roundhouse in 2007 (he died of cancer in 2005, aged just 60) saw appearances from everyone from Pete Townshend to Gary Moore and Paul Weller.

However, Capaldi (born in Worcestershire into a family of Italian musicians) was way more than just a groovy mystic, as this exhaustive 66 track set compiled by his widow Anna proves.

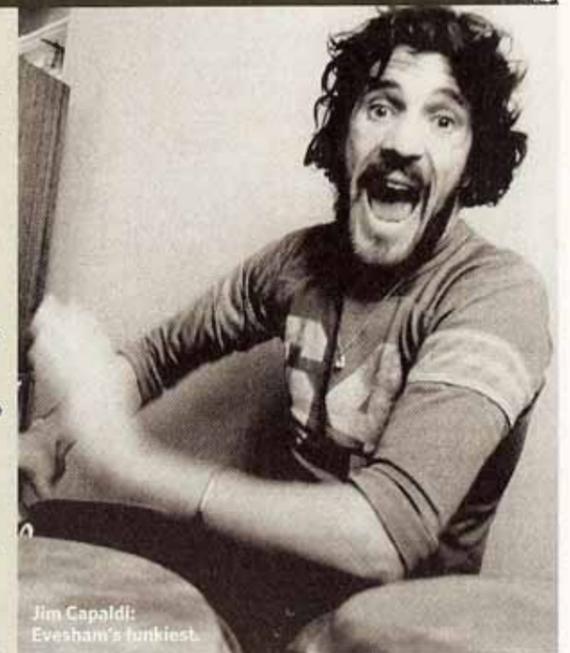
Tracing his journey from teenage beat group The Hellions via his time in Traffic and his 12 solo albums, *Dear Mr Fantasy* is a reminder that Capaldi was, first and foremost, a great pop songwriter, capable of tearjerking balladry (*Love You Til The Day I Die*) and heartfelt social comment (*Favella Song*), usually harnessed to a kinetic, ragamuffin groove.

It's a little frustrating that his formative years are largely glossed over. The Hellions *Daydreaming*

Of You and *Deep Feeling's* psych-pop ditty *Pretty Colours* serve as fascinating dry-runs for Capaldi's lysergic lyrics for Traffic, but we're afforded only four tracks by the Midlands answer to Crosby, Stills and Nash.

It's his effortless way with a pop melody throughout his 30 year solo career that makes up for this oversight. 1974 hit *It's All Up To You* is a perfectly pitched declaration of emotional paralysis, while the other tracks from first three solo albums (*Oh How We Danced*, *Whale Meat Again* and *Short Cut Draw Blood*) are uniform only in their excellence; funky, sun-baked tips of the hat to everyone from The Stones (*Tricky Dicky Rides Again*) to Santana (*Low Rider*).

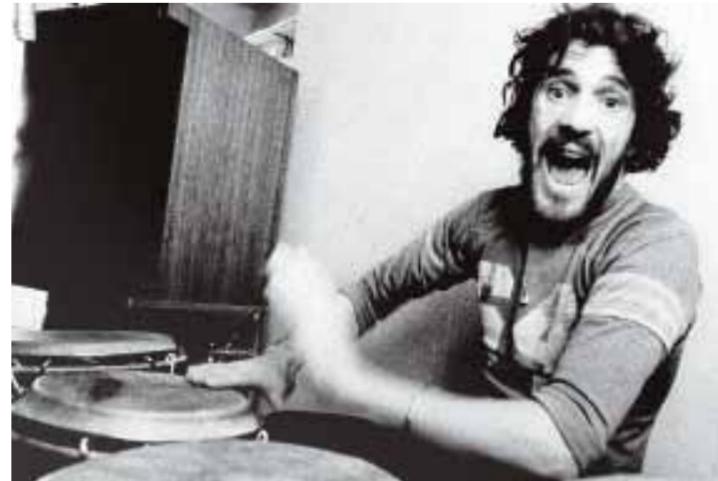
While a previously unreleased collaboration with George Harrison (*Love's Got A Hold On Me*) and a handful of unreleased out-takes will delight completists, this isn't necessarily the place to start an investigation into Capaldi's music.



Jim Capaldi: Evesham's funkiest.

Still, it's an overdue tribute to one of rock's most overlooked songwriters, a storming version of *Dear Mr Fantasy* recorded prior to Traffic's induction into the Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame in 2004 a bitter reminder that the Grim Reaper regularly gets things horribly wrong.

★★★★★
Paul Moody

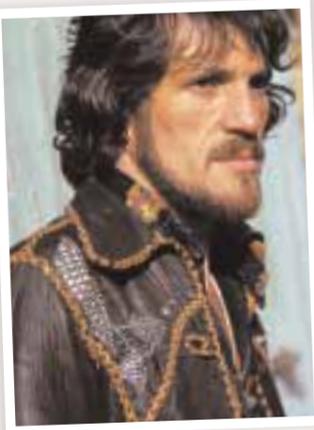


The real Mr Fantasy

ALTHOUGH JIM Capaldi is best-known for his work with the iconic Traffic an excellent new box set, compiled by Jim's widow, Anahina, is a reminder that there was much more to his talent than that. Not only does it include several tracks from his excellent Seventies solo albums but there are also unreleased demo recordings from the album he was planning shortly before his death, from stomach cancer, in January 2005 and a song recorded with his old friend George Harrison.

"Before Jim passed away I promised that I would put together a box set of his music and a book of his lyrics, both of which are coming out around the same time," explains Aninha.

"I'm from Brazil originally, and I met Jim when I came over to England in the summer of 1975.



Prior to that I was a big fan of Traffic, which was a big band in Brazil. Doing the box set was interesting for me because I went back to his work before Traffic for some of the tracks.

"I had help choosing the music but it was essentially my choice. I had some songs that were close to my heart, one that Jim wrote for our eldest daughter *Tabitha* when she was a baby and my other daughter *Tallulah*, which he recorded a demo for in 2003."

Anahina is especially fond of the George Harrison collaboration, *Love's Got A Hold On Me*, since it brings back many happy memories of her and Jim's friendship with the ex-Beatle and his wife Olivia.

George and Jim were very close friends, especially towards the end of George's life. They would often go into George's studio and play music together and this particular song they wrote in about 1997. They were both very excited by it but unfortunately, for various reasons, nothing came of it. But for me it's one of the highlights of the set."

Another highlight is a live version of Jim's favourite Traffic song, *Dear Mr Fantasy*, recorded at the 2004 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame concert. "That was the last time Steve Winwood and Jim played together, so that was very poignant."

■ *Dear Mr Fantasy* is released through Island Records. For details of Jim's book of lyrics go to: (www.genesis-publications.com).

Remembering a lifetime in music

A NEW collection of material by one of Worcestershire's greatest song-writers and drummers has been released. The four-CD boxed set *Dear Mr Fantasy* featuring the work of Evesham-born Jim Capaldi – pictured – is out this week, with previously unreleased tracks by the former Traffic lyricist. It is also packed with rare photos and essays.

Drummer and vocalist Capaldi died in January 2005, shortly after Traffic were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Although Capaldi is best remembered for his work with the band, he was a highly successful lyricist working with Bob Marley and The Eagles and collaborating with Eric Clapton, Van Morrison and George Harrison.

The boxed set features a treat for fans with an unreleased demo track recorded with ex-Beatle Harrison at his Buckinghamshire home in the mid-1990s entitled *Love's Got A Hold On Me*.

The set has been put together with input from Capaldi's wife Anna, who said the 67-track compilation reflected her husband's wide-ranging career from his early association with beat band The Hellions to the 1993 Traffic reunion and beyond.

Capaldi spent the 1960s

BY RICHARD VERNALLS

playing the club scene around Worcester and Birmingham with The Hellions, which eventually evolved, after a line-up change, into Deep Feeling.

Born in 1948, he came from a musical family.

"His father was an accordion player, and his mother was a singer," said Mrs Capaldi.

"His father used to say he would hit anything possible, from an early age – including pots to pans. That was his natural way.

"When he was 14 he had a row with his dad because his dad wanted him to knuckle down, so he left home and stayed with friends in Worcester and never went back.

"He said the only proper job he had was working for three months at the Lea and Perrins factory, but he was sacked because his late-night gigs made him late every morning."

In 1967 Capaldi formed Traffic with Steve Winwood, Dave Mason and Chris Wood and they released the album *Mr Fantasy*. The band folded before reforming with a slightly changed line-up still including Capaldi.

Through the 1970s Capaldi,

still playing with Traffic, launched a solo career and contributed on material with other artists, playing on into the 1980s and 90s.

Capaldi wrote the lyrics to Bob Marley's *This Is Reggae Music* and co-wrote The Eagles' *Love Will Keep Us Alive*.

There were tours and collaborations until the end of his life but Capaldi always had the idea of doing a compilation to bring together a life's work.

"He always wanted to do it, but he got sick and it was very quick – he only lasted six months after he was diagnosed with cancer, but he wanted to do it, so I carried it on," said Mrs Capaldi.

One of his collaborations was with 'close friend' George Harrison. The two had lived a few miles from each other in Buckinghamshire and Capaldi "would go over and help George in the garden, then afterwards they would go in the studio and mess around jamming and writing songs, and one of those is *Love Got A Hold On Me*", said Mrs Capaldi.

"The plan was to finish it but of course George got ill and we moved away for a while and it never got done."

For details visit jimcapaldi.com or islandrecords.co.uk.

