



Charley Foskett

The musician/producer sits down with **JOHN MOORE**, to chat about why after a long and varied career, he's finally decided to put out an album of his own music — aptly titled *Late Bloomer*

After 50 years in the musical trenches — as gigging musician, creating ads and jingles as part of Off-beat Music in Hammersmith, as a songwriter, as a producer, and as something akin to an impresario and general mover-and-shaker — Charley Foskett has a guitar case full of tales, which he's more than happy to share in his effusive, engaging, self-deprecating style. A

prime example of this is when a simple question regarding where he cut his studio teeth quickly derails thanks to a series of stories that include (but are not limited to): a frustrating four-week UK tour for a single that was released late; exhaustion; Greg Walsh (producer for Tina Turner, Heaven 17 and many more) showing him how to use the EQ on a Teac four-track; his brief stint as the bass player for a nascent Roxy

Music (“In exchange for playing bass, I could store my kit at Ferry’s house... well, it wasn’t Ferry’s house it was actually owned by two models and he was living there”) and ends up with him talking about his time at Tittenhurst, working in John Lennon’s old studio with Zak Starkey, Ringo and engineer Martin Adam as part of an heroin awareness charity project that Foskett claims was stifled by the UK government.

It’s a mad, mad world...

That music, part of 1986’s *The Anti-Heroine Project* LP *It’s A Live-in World*, was a small section of a four-sided album of songs by artists including Paul McCartney (*Simple as That*, co-produced by Charley), Elvis Costello and Dire Straits and represented 20 months of voluntary work by Foskett from offices at EMI. However, the record’s title single would eventually be banned by the BBC at the behest

“Everything recorded is a performance; so my job as a producer is to capture the magic of that — and I think I did for every damn note on the whole of this record...”

of British powers-that-be, according to Charley, effectively killing its chances of success. He believes the move came after he declined to become part of the Government’s own anti-drugs campaign team.

In the aftermath of that debacle, Foskett moved away from his projects in the jingle business and began working as a gigging producer, taking whatever projects came his way all across Europe. Along with this, came the odd bass gig (Dexy’s Midnight Runners being a notable example), multiple songwriting collaborations, and work with friends, contacts and clients at his private home studio in Dunstable. That studio — a simple one room set-up, save for a vocal booth, based around Logic Pro and a tried-and-tested set of NS10s sitting on top of the desk — is where I sit down with him for our chat. It is every inch the comfortable songwriting/advanced project set-up, scattered with instruments, manuals



/ Charley and friend getting to work in his private studio

and old bits of kit (we see you, superceded Mac G3, bless you).

It’s here that Charley has, after all of his adventures, finally taken time to make an album of his own. Called *Late Bloomer*, it’s an engaging

folk LP that’s delivered in Foskett’s distinctive Newcastle brogue (aka ‘Geordie’ accent, for our non-UK readers). That’s ostensibly what we’re here to talk about, but... y’know, things rarely travel in straight lines with Charley. ▶

The Periscope

World’s first microphone with built-in compressor



Expect
Excitement
www.scopelabs.eu



/ Diagnosis

After spending years telling people ‘you can do it a bit better’, how hard did you find to bring your production know-how to your own work?

After all that time, I’ve been working for over four years on my debut — and I’m one of those people who works the music, the arrangement, the production, the mix, the whole project, to the far end of a fart, really. Because I’ve got to be happy with it. For decades, it’s been my job to stretch the living daylight out of other people. And on *Late Bloomer*, I’ve had to stretch myself.

If it was client work, I’d never cut corners

because they’re paying me — or the record label’s paying, whoever — for that. The trick is knowing the point where I’m the only one who’s going to be able to hear a problem. With clients, they’re listening to the important things: they’re listening to the top line and the lyric and the groove. All the other stuff is icing.

Why embark on a solo career now?

I was diagnosed with cancer on Christmas Eve 2010, and my business went down the toilet in early 2011. Clients just disappeared; two or three European clients, one Italian client... I never heard from them again. They owed me

thousands, and I didn’t give a damn because I had Cancer and I wanted to keep living. The whole career, all of that, just became so insignificant.

By the end of 2011, I was told I was okay... I wasn’t, but I started trying to rebuild the business and trying to get some of those clients back. That never happened, because they considered me gone. Off the planet.

Then I was re-diagnosed in 2014, and it was worse. That took a year of treatment, surgeries, chemo, radiation, you name it — the whole thing. So by the end of that year, I found myself looking like a stick insect, not really being able to stand up. I had an epiphany; I hadn’t opened this place for a long time and my wife said, ‘get your bass out’, and so I thought, ‘okay, I’ll go into the studio’.

I came in here and it took time to remember how things worked again, it was weird. You get this thing called ‘chemo brain’, which is cancer-related cognitive impairment, which basically stops you bringing stuff back from memory.

In songwriting sessions, I was always a slow writer and really terrible at lyrics, but I’m a good crap detector and good at starting things off. So, when I thought ‘I’ll write a song’, I just had a line in my head, which was ‘Pull on The Rope.’

I thought, ‘I’m going to do this, I’m not going to get somebody in to write the lyrics!’

Three weeks later, I finished!

How did the rawness of the folk music style bash against your inclination to arrange?

I finished the song and I got a few mates around and recorded it quickly: a guitarist, a horn and a fiddle player and it came out as a folk song. We did a little video — and I look at it now and I’m so skinny. It was such great fun, and the whole process was a massive distraction, because you’re left with this awful psychological trauma that’s held in your head every second of the day. It was wonderful, and I thought ‘I’ll write another one’ in the same way.

QUESTED
STUDIO MONITORS

“Truth is ever to be found in the simplicity”
Isaac Newton

quested.com | info@quested.com

At what point did it feel like a proper project?

I played some tracks to Eliza Carthy — the daughter of Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson, British folk royalty — and she said: 'Why are you singing with an American accent..?'

Well, because I kicked-off copying Little Richard and Chuck Berry and never stopped... She said, 'that's not acceptable in British folk music, because you've got to at least give a nod to the tradition and sing in your regional accent.'

I went: 'what, a geordie accent? You're kidding...!' But she wasn't, so I tried. It sounded terrible at first, my kids said I sounded like a pirate. But I worked on it with some local folk guys, and I felt comfortable with them and they were very positive about the vocals. I kept working on the delivery and kept cleaning it up a bit.

I've worked with zillions of singers, some great singers, and given them direction. I know the difference between something energised and something that hasn't got the emotion, hasn't got the feeling and is a bit, you know, empty. It's got to be believable and somebody's got to believe it and if they believe they'll buy it.

I got to the point where I felt that I wasn't hearing anything that I was embarrassed about. I didn't feel self-conscious about it.

Using your accent must inform you lyrically, and change the character of any song?

That's right. There are three or four songs that are from friends of mine who are great songwriters. And with their songs, I was being careful not to let anything through that was remotely American. I've heard the same word a few times: 'authentic'. And I thought, 'okay, I'll take that as a compliment'.

With folk and roots music, it is all about the story. You're telling a story. There's no 'baby, baby' kind of stuff. It is a story. Yet everything recorded is a performance; so my job as a producer is to capture the magic of that — and I think I did for every damn note on the whole of this record. It's got Aiden Burke, one of Ireland's top Celtic fiddle players, and Toby Shear, who's toured with Mike McGoldrick and John McCusker — two other top guys who have been playing with Knopfler's band for quite a while. Aiden and Toby, they're musical geniuses, they did just fabulous.

When I got all the takes, all the different tracks, it was mixing and tweaking and mixing and tweaking... I even thought I was going to master it. But in the end we used a guy called Andy Thompson at Sound Performance. I went to his place a couple of times and... beautiful! When I got back from working with Andy, it was the same mixes, but just beautiful!

I know you've been through quite a lot of technology changes, but your approach to production seems to be pretty consistent.

I do edit stuff, and chop it up, move it around, and I like to sort of move bits of the song arrangement more than I would have done on a



/ A storyteller in real life and on record

tape with a Chinagraph pencil and razor. But, of course, everybody's doing that. Everybody is processing in order to compete with the best records, you've got to.

I love to listen, and I never stop learning; I often think 'I'd love to get my hands on that [track], because I could remix that and make that so much better... But you should always consider that you may be wrong in thinking that way. Always wonder whether you're trying to make that old Ford Popular into a Rolls Royce, when really everybody just wants that old Ford Popular!

Our conversations rambles on for much longer than is practical to relate in this article, including plans for Charley's next big project. That will involve him diving back into his contacts book for an album of duets. Of course by the time he's told me about this, we've covered a lot of other ground and explored several non-sequiturs, such is his way. You can find out more about Charley and *Late Bloomer* from www.foskettsfolkfactory.com, or listen to the LP via streaming services. 

