

# Guitar man

By Phil Hewitt



The ideal is that golden moment when you stop playing the guitar and the guitar starts playing you.

It's an ideal that Duncan McKenzie – regarded as one of the finest acoustic guitarists playing on the UK circuit today - is attaining more and more.

At the age of 55, the Felpham-based singer-songwriter is enjoying a golden spell.

He HAS got an interim album out this month and a major release planned for this summer.

The current album is very much a limited edition entitled simply Ltd Edition, a CD which stands as an album in its own right, but also points the way to Duncan's Ordinary Man which will be out in July.

In a way, Ltd Edition, available through his website, clears the decks – all part of a busily creative time for Duncan, a musician who counts blues, celtic and flamenco 'among the ingredients of the cake that I am!'

"I am doing my album at the studios in Brighton which belong to the Levellers, and I am working with the best producer that I have ever worked with, Al Scott, who has also produced the Levellers."

Al is proving just the perfect partner, a great musician who knows just how to put it into practice and exactly how to deliver.

In the meantime, Ltd Edition – of which there will be just a couple of hundred produced – offers what Duncan calls the tracks that everybody wants to hear

Among them is Cyndi, a particularly significant track in Duncan's career, one that sums up the musician he is now and the musician he refused to be when the commercial world threatened.

"I wrote it 30 years ago when I was a fairly young man," Duncan recalls. He played it to the people who counted and was told that he didn't 'sell himself enough' with it, in the sense that he didn't know how to put the song across to his and its best advantage.

Looking back, Duncan accepts the point – but he strongly resisted when he was told that it was just the perfect song to hand over to legendary sixties era folk-rock singer-songwriter Tim Hardin.

"I got a bee in my bonnet and said 'Well, he can't have it!'

It was ego speaking, Duncan admits, but he suddenly realised that the song was just too important to him: "And I just thought 'no one else is going to have that song!'"

So important in fact that the song has remained until now unpublished: "I ended up getting a bit of a mental block. They were right. I wasn't experienced enough to know how to sell a song.

"After all these years, I said to Al that I wanted to get the song Cyndi down but that I felt I just couldn't record it in a way that I was happy with."

It was a song which Al promptly unlocked: "I got the song done just as I had always wanted in nearly 30 years. Where the notes came from, I have just no idea. If I had spent months working on the arrangement, I couldn't have done it."

The recording proudly sits as track number two on Ltd Edition – a little measure perhaps of Duncan's musical journey in the years since he wrote it.

In 1980, he had a record deal with EMI. It was a disaster: "They heard one of my songs and thought it would be fantastic for the Eurovision song contest. I should have seen the light straight away!

Duncan saw they wanted to turn him into a 'horrifying Eurovision popstar' – most definitely not the vision Duncan had himself. And so he and EMI parted company.

"I was so uncomfortable. I was a bit like a spider in an aquarium – all legs and nowhere to go."

The song got down to the final 20 out of the 600 vying for the Eurovision slot that Duncan wasn't coveting – though he admits he was bitterly disappointed at the way things turned out with EMI, a setback from which he didn't know if he could recover.

But it was an experience which proved grist to his musician's mill – all part of the path which has brought him to the good place he finds himself now.

Take 3rd Millennium, the opening song on Ltd