






MIKE SCOTT - THE WATERBOYS

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With their cross-pollination of literate, soulful rock & roll and folk traditions of the British Isles, the Waterboys have tread a multitude of musical paths since singer/songwriter Mike Scott formed the group in London in the early '80s. From the grandiose "Big Music" of their early classic, *This Is the Sea*, on through the rich Celtic-inspired folk-rock of their 1988 highlight, *Fisherman's Blues*, the mercurial Scotsman has made dramatic sea changes a regular occurrence, swapping lineups and chasing stylistic whims on an almost album-to-album basis. Across nearly four decades of work, Scott's sonic and spiritual explorations have been shared by literally dozens of bandmembers, though only fiddler Steve Wickham (and to some extent early mainstay Antony Thistlethwaite) has maintained his post as a Waterboy for a significant portion of the group's existence. In his dual role as restless seeker and wily rock & roll romantic, Scott has consistently steered the band toward interesting projects — like 2003's *Universal Hall*, recorded at a remote Scottish commune, and 2011's *An Appointment with Mr. Yeats*, which featured eclectic, almost baroque-rock adaptations of W.B. Yeats' poetry — with each new album adding another layer to the Waterboys' distinctive patina. Scott's musical wanderings continued with vigor into the next decade with the release of 2020's *Good Luck, Seeker*.

A native of Edinburgh, Scott first became involved in music as the creator of the fanzine *Jungleland* and later played in a series of local punk outfits. After college, where he studied English and philosophy, Scott and his band *Another Pretty Face* recorded some demos in London; following the group's breakup in 1981, he formed the Waterboys, so named after a line in the Lou Reed song "The Kids" but wholly appropriate given Scott's recurring lyrical fascination with sea imagery.

A newspaper advertisement calling for musicians led to a response from multi-instrumentalist Anthon Thistlethwaite, and along with drummer Kevin Wilkinson, the Waterboys issued their self-titled debut in 1983. A particularly cinematic mix of post-punk and new wave with a healthy dose of romanticism, Scott's approach during this period would later be described to as "The Big Music," after a single of the same name that appeared on their next album, *A Pagan Place*. Released in 1984 and aided by keyboardist Karl Wallinger and trumpeter Roddy Lorimer, the record expanded the group's rich, dramatic sound while further exploring Scott's interest in spirituality. With 1985's *This Is the Sea*, the Waterboys reached an early peak; a majestic, ambitious record, it earned the group a significant hit with the single "The Whole of the Moon." However, after the album's release, Wallinger departed to form *World Party*, leaving Scott to strike out in a new direction altogether, thus ending the band's "Big Music" phase.

Relocating to Dublin, Scott, Thistlethwaite, and fiddler Steve Wickham began incorporating traditional Irish music, country, and soul into the Waterboys' sound. This new folk- and Celtic-inspired approach culminated in 1988's excellent *Fisherman's Blues*, marking a dramatic sonic reinvention that polarized some of their earlier fans, but has ultimately come to be considered one of the band's finest releases. Taking this new approach even further, Scott added several new folk and traditional players like accordionist Sharon Shannon and flautist Colin Blakey to the mix for 1990's vibrant British Isles journey *Room to Roam*. Similar to their "Big Music" period, the folky Waterboys lineup of the late '80s has been referred to as the "Raggle Taggle Band" era, named for their rendition of the traditional song "The Raggle Taggle Gypsy" that appears on *Room to Roam*.

Changing tacks once again, Scott moved to New York without Thistlethwaite, Wickham, or any of his other mainstay bandmembers. The release of 1993's *Dream Harder*, cut with American session musicians, marked a return to an electric hard rock sound. In spite of a fairly poor critical response, it yielded a pair of singles that reached the U.K. Top 30 and fared better chart-wise than its predecessor. Not long after its release, Scott abandoned the Waterboys name and, moving back to Scotland, began a lengthy stay at the Findhorn spiritual commune, where he recorded 1995's acoustic folk LP *Bring 'Em All In* under his own name. A second, more rock-driven solo album, *Still Burning*, appeared in 1997. By early 1999, Scott was at work on another record with a host of different musicians; among them were Thistlethwaite and original Waterboys drummer Kevin Wilkinson, although tragically, the latter took his own life in July of that year.

In 2000, Scott released *Rock in the Weary Land* under the Waterboys name, referring to its edgy experimental sound as "Sonic Rock." The following year saw the release of *Too Close to Heaven* (titled *Fisherman's Blues, Pt. 2* in the U.S.), which collated a group of outtakes, demos, and alternate versions of songs from the *Fisherman's Blues* era. With Wickham again a full-time member, it heralded another sea change for the band, who again headed in a more folk-oriented direction on 2003's *Universal Hall*, named after and recorded at the theater at the Findhorn Foundation, to which Scott retained a deep connection. Following a 2005 live outing, *Karma to Burn*, the Waterboys returned with 2007's more spirited *Book of Lightning*, which was recorded mostly live in the studio.

After a couple of years of touring and time off, Scott assembled and released a compilation of unreleased songs from the Waterboys' *This Is the Sea* sessions called *In a Special Place*. He also published a memoir entitled *Kiss the Wind: A Waterboy's Adventures in Music*. Around this time, he, Wickham, and bassist Marc Arciero also assembled a new version of the Waterboys who began performing together in late 2010 and early 2011. In March they entered a studio to record a new project built around the work of one of Scott's lifelong heroes. Released in the fall of 2011, *An Appointment with Mr. Yeats* was a collection of new songs whose lyrics were taken from the poems of William Butler Yeats.

In January 2015, the Waterboys returned to entirely original music with *Modern Blues*. Recorded in Nashville, produced by Scott, and mixed by Bob Clearmountain, it reached number 14 on the U.K. Albums chart, marking the band's highest appearance since 1993. Scott's next Waterboys project was an ambitious and eclectic double album, 2017's *Out of All This Blue*, which added elements of country, R&B, and hip-hop to the group's mix. Scott and company continued to blur genres in 2019 with *Where the Action Is*, which took its title from the chorus of Robert Parker's '60s Northern soul classic "Let's Go Baby." The prolific run continued into 2020 with *Good Luck, Seeker*, a typically adventurous Waterboys set that featured the sprawling, seven-minute single "My Wanderings in the Weary Land." ~ Timothy Monger & Jason Ankeny