MARK CUNNINGHAM REFLECTS ON THE SAD PASSING OF A LIVE PRODUCTION ICON...

MICK KLUCZYNSKI: A Life Well Lived

Last month’s TPi Awards 2009 event was dedicated to production management maestro Mick Kluczynski, a true legend and a dear friend of the live music industry, who sadly passed away, aged 59, on the night of Friday 6 February after a short illness. He is survived by his wife, Mari, to whom we send our deepest condolences.

At the time of his death, Mick was spearheading the preparations for yet another BRIT Awards — the event he had worked on for more than a decade — although he had told TPi just before Christmas that he was planning to retire immediately afterwards.

“He was his own man in the best possible way. None of the band of Floydian brothers, musos, roadies, from those early days, will ever forget the 28 fried eggs...” Roger Waters

Born in Aberdeen on March 30 1949, Mick’s professional career began in 1968 with the Inverness band Spiggy Topes whilst also working as a local promoter. But it was in 1972 that he seized his first major break, when Chris Adamson invited him to join the Pink Floyd crew as the band were introducing an in-progress version of The Dark Side Of The Moon to their live set.

Mick became one of the band’s famed ‘Quad Squad’ and will be remembered with fondness by his former colleagues, including Robbie Williams who said: “Mick was the first person who I worked alongside when I started with Pink Floyd in 1972.

“His larger than life character introduced me to touring and his experience help me to survive life on the road. He will be sadly missed.”

Chris Adamson took a break from rehearsals in the States with Fleetwood Mac to tell me: “One of the things I’ll always remember about the Floyd crew and band members — was that we loved a silly bet, especially Mick.

“We were with the band in France while they worked on the soundtrack of La Vallée [Obscured By Clouds] and to break the boredom, someone put a bet on me not being able to eat a stone of raw potatoes which, as it turned out, wasn’t a problem! Mick responded by eating a vast quantity of fried eggs! On a serious note, Mick was a great guy and it was a pleasure to call him a friend.”

Pink Floyd’s Roger Waters offered his own personal tribute: “I hadn’t seen Mick Kluczynski for many years, but I remember him very well. He was his own man in the best possible way; he had that very dry Scots wit that brightens our days and as I recall could dead lift a thousand pounds.

“None of the band of Floydian brothers, musos, roadies, whatever, from those early days, will ever forget the 28 fried eggs. I send my heartfelt condolences to his family and close friends and offer my deep respect to the man.”

TRUE BRIT

As well as touring with Pink Floyd, Mick was part of the equation when the band founded Britannia Row to make their equipment available for hire when they were off the road. “It was Mick and Robbie Williams who essentially ran the audio department,” said Bryan Grant, Brit Row’s MD.

“When we decided to establish a New York office and warehouse, with a view to attracting American clients, it was Mick who volunteered to cross the Atlantic and help set-up the organisation.”

After founding the company’s US operation around 1978, Mick soon turned freelance and worked on several leading tours throughout the ‘80s, most notably as production manager for
The Cure.

By the early ’90s, Mick was growing tired of touring and began concentrating on the one-off specials that would revolutionise his life, his career and indeed a generation’s perception of televised live music.

He began this process with Bob Birch and Eve Watts at Birchwatt Events, but to enable a fuller transition and offer a “complete event production solution”, he founded MJK Productions in 1994 with Kate Wright, his business partner up until his death, who continues to look after MJK’s financial and logistical departments.

With MJK, Mick headed the technical production for the MOBO Awards, the VESO celebrations, countless corporate events, the Spice Girls’ live debut in Istanbul, the Classical

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Robbie Williams

BRIT Awards and the aforementioned BRITs.

He was also notable as one of the founding fathers of the Production Services Association (PSA) — now administered through TPi’s parent company, Mondiale Publishing Limited — as well as being an original driving force behind the International Live Music Conference (ILMC).

LEGACY

My fellow scribe, Mike Lethby, a former editor at Live! magazine, recalled some of the distinctive qualities that earned Mick such high respect. He said: “Mick was the production manager who — among many other things and all the high standards that he in many ways pioneered — was one of the few who bothered to embrace the trade press, very specifically because he wanted the world to understand how the business in the late ’80s/early ’90s needed to change.

“It could no longer be a cottage industry having a good time; it was becoming a serious profession that needed to deliver quality, integrity and value to the client. Hence his start-up role in the PSA — a legacy he leaves to the pro side of the industry that most people who’ve enjoyed seeing his events will never appreciate. But he was happy to spread the word for best practice, honesty and delivering a supreme result.

“Back in 1992, when he heard I was writing a piece for Live!, he asked to be interviewed, along with his then business partner Bob Birch, to try to explain what exactly it is (or was then) that a production manager does.

“This was quite adventurous in those still not very-tech days when the Internet and full-on e-mail were still inconceivable outside of academia, so you toured with fax machines. But helping a wayward industry become more professional, more proud of itself and its achievements, was always at the forefront of his mind.”

Mike recalled the VESO Hyde Park celebrations at which Mr. K commented on the Scottish Highlanders’ endless bagpipe rehearsals outside his portacabin in the blazing July heat: “If ah never hear another f***ing bagpipe in ma life, laddie, it’ll be too f***ing soon for me!”

Mick backed the BRIT Awards production effort as a showcase for new technology, as Mike Lethby observed: “He sold those concepts (and costs) up the line to the powers-that-be. As he once said to me, ‘We can’t just sit here and do the same sh*t year after year; we have to push it every time’.”

Clearly, it was this attitude that resulted in the first use on a mainstream UK live music TV show of everything from a fully digital audio production chain (from live sound to broadcast), to 6mm LED screens, Syncrolites and many other innovations.

STARRY-EYED

Although I’d enjoyed many an hour in Mick’s company, either documenting his work on the BRIT Awards or listening to him reminisce about the days of yore over several long café lunches, it was actually back in 1977 that I first met him, albeit unwittingly.

I went with some older school pals to see the Floyd at Wembley Arena (then Empire Pool) during their Animals tour and just before the gig started I spotted a stocky-looking chap walk out from the barrier at stage left.

“As he headed for front of house, I followed him and with all the naivety of a starry-eyed teenager, I asked him what his role was on the tour.

“See that?” he said, gesturing towards the stage. “I make all that happen.” Sixteen years later, I met Mick again, this time for professional reasons. I recounted my teenage tale and he almost chocked with embarrassment!

AWARD

It was fitting that we dedicated this year’s TPi Awards to Mick. Four years ago, in the company of former colleague David Gilmour, Phil Taylor, ex-BRIT Awards producer Lisa Anderson and our host Paul Gambaccini, he was presented with TPi’s prestigious Lifetime Contribution Award in acknowledgement of his long and eventful career.

In 2004, when I interviewed him for our regular Vital Stats page, Mick revealed that his greatest inspiration was The Band’s album, Cahoots.

He described himself as a “born worker” and that whilst he had never been particularly ambitious, the one thing that would have persuaded him to return to the touring life, would have been if The Dark Side Of The Moon had taken to the road once more with its original line-up. Thanks to politics and ultimately fate, that will forever remain a fantasy.

His ‘advice to a teenage Mick Kluczynski’ was loaded with the accumulated wisdom of a life lived to the full. “Do the same again, but do it better.”

THE FINAL LOAD-OUT

The Floyd camp has not been immune to sadness in recent years, having witnessed the passing of Syd Barrett, Richard Wright, orchestral arranger Michael Kamen, band manager Steve O’Rourke, recording engineer Nick Griffiths, tour managers Tony Howard and Warwick McCready, and John Roden, who served as monitor engineer on David Gilmour’s On An Island tour.

And now, The Great Gig In The Sky has a new production manager. Safe journey, Mick.

TPi

Photography courtesy of Phil Taylor, Seth Goldman, Louise Stickland & Mike Lethby

Mick’s funeral was held at Mortlake Crematorium on Saturday 21 February. Donations to the MICK KLUCZYNSKI MEMORIAL FUND will be distributed between the RSPB, The Orang-utan Foundation and The Child Carers Fund. See www.psa.org.uk for details.