

Nick van Eede of Cutting Crew "Happy Survivor" by Lois Wilson

Formed in 1985 by singer, songwriter Nick Van Eede and guitarist Kevin Scott MacMichael with the line up completed by bassist Colin Farley and drummer Martin 'Frosty' Beedle, Cutting Crew enjoyed huge success with their 1986 debut single, '(I Just) Died In Your Arms', which shot into the Top 5 in the UK and hit the top spot in the US. Three albums followed - 1986's Broadcast, 1989's The Scattering and 1992's Compus Mentus before the group split.

Born in Sussex in 1958, Nick was possibly destined to make music. His grandfather, a rail worker, was a violinist and led the local dance band. His father, a builder, was a weekend deejay. "He had collected 9000 seven-inch singles, everything from the Sex Pistols to Nina Simone," Eede says. The first record Eede bought at 8 years old was 'A Groovy Kind Of Love' by The Mindbenders. As he grew older he discovered and adored T.Rex, Lou Reed and The Police before the inevitable dive into the prog-rock of Yes and Genesis and Van Der Graaf Generator.

While at school he got the chance to write and narrate school musicals and on leaving school, while working in the operating theatre at East Grinstead's Queen Victoria Hospital, he played in the local pub the Guinea Pig every Thursday and it was there he was discovered by Chas Chandler, former bassist with The Animals. "Chas' son came in for an operation and Chas went for a pint and he put his business card on my amp and said, 'Give me a call on Monday morning' and I did and two weeks later I was in Poland supporting Slade, just me singing with my acoustic guitar."

'Rock'N'Roll Fool', was released which became Eede's first of three solo singles released in 1978 and 1979. Then in 1982 with bassist Mac Norman and drummer Steve Boorer, he formed his first band The Drivers. "We were as skinny as rakes and just wild, a bit like Squeeze on speed," he says. While The Drivers never broke the UK, they were popular in Canada where signed to Bernard Solomon's Dalcorte Records they hit with 1982 single 'Tears On Your Anorak' which was produced by Terry Brown, famed for his work with Rush.

It was also while touring in Canada that Eede met Kevin MacMichael. "Kevin was from Halifax, Nova Scotia and playing in a band called Fast Forward who supported The Drivers," explains Eede, "and it was love at first sight musically. He was playing a guitar synthesiser and no one did that at that time. We talked after a show, we had the same sense of humour and I said if ever your band ends please call me."

When Fast Forward split, MacMichael put in the call. The Drivers had by then also parted company. "We were on tour in Vancouver and the tour manager suddenly said, 'Everybody! Suitcases in the carpark two minutes.' We basically did a runner. The federal government had shut down Bernie's company," Eede says.

In 1985 MacMichael flew into Heathrow to meet Eede. "He was going to start this new life in the UK and he came with just his acoustic guitar and a holdall and that was it.

We started writing immediately and playing the pubs to pay the bills and then when we felt it was the right time, we got in Colin and Frosty. To this day Colin is the greatest bassist I've

ever played with and he had a PA and recording gear and was very clued up about engineering. Frosty had been touring on the QE2 with the Joe Loss Orchestra. He was incredibly accomplished.”

The first time he met Frosty though Eede wasn't sure it would work out. “He came in and had headphones in. I said ‘Hi Frosty’. He said, ‘Hang on, I’m listening to the test match.’ But he set his kit up and just played brilliantly. The best decision ever made!”

For Eede, the demo of Kites included on this set provides a snapshot of the group's earliest days. “It's me, Kevin and Colin with all his gear in my mum and dad's lounge,” Eede remembers fondly, “and it's us finding who we are. I've still not quite got my voice yet, but Kevin's got his guitar synth and playing these gorgeous spread chords, which are all over the sound of Cutting Crew.”

With half an album already written by Eede including their future singles ‘(I Just) Died In Your Arms’, ‘I've Been In Love Before’ and ‘One For The Mockingbird’, they made a demo cassette and sent it out to labels. “The songs were so strong that it wasn't long before we got the call. And it was fabulous and daunting and scary,” Eede says. Up to that point though they'd never played live concentrating instead on rehearsals and making demos so they called themselves Cutting Crew “after something we read where Queen said they were a cutting crew, as they hadn't done any gigs for a long while and had just been cutting records in the studio,” he explains.

The group arranged a showcase at London's Nomis studio for record companies and Siren Records, run by David Betteridge and a part of Virgin Records, snapped them up on the spot.

“From that moment on it was nuts,” says Eede. “They released ‘(I Just) Died In Your Arms’ and it was massive but there was no plan, nothing in place. If they'd built up to it, released other tracks first, we could have been ready for what came.”

Instead ‘(I Just) Died In Your Arms’ was issued as their first single in August 1986 and hit Number 4 in the UK. Eede had recorded his lead vocal in Air studios where his pregnant partner stood watching and looking at her watch. “It was hard, I was about to become a dad and on the verge of having a huge hit. It lent the vocal a little urgency.” He jokes.

There were performances on Top Of The Pops and Wogan and an endless round of promotional interviews to do. “It was a whirlwind and I never stopped,” Eede says. “Kevin loved doing Top Of The Pops but doing the Johnny Carson show in the US was the big deal for me. It was Johnny Carson's birthday and they were expecting 83 million viewers.” ‘(I Just) Died In Your Arms’ provided Virgin with its first major US hit when it reached Number 1.

While the single had been recorded in London, sessions for their debut album Broadcast took place in MediaSound in New York at the behest of the label. Issued in October 1986, it only made Number 41 in the UK but reached the Top 20 in the US.

“Broadcast was my album,” says Eede. “I wrote three quarters of it, I had the vision and Terry Brown was my right hand man and the guys gave everything in their playing, they were fabulous. I could never have asked for more from them.”

The band's second single 'I've Been In Love Before' taken from the album was released the same month. Recorded in a converted church in Manhattan with MacMichael playing an acoustic guitar the group had found in a loft apartment they were renting in Tribeca, it reached Number 31 in the UK but released in August 1987 in the US made the Top 10. Later that same year they were nominated for a Grammy Award for Best New Artist. "We didn't win but we were happening," says Eede. "We were playing sold out shows across America, we got to go to Prince's after-show Grammy party."

Yet for all their US success, they had little creative control. "We were coming up against the industry a lot," says Eede. "Richard Branson had cherrypicked a team in the States, he had the best A&R guy, the best promotional guy, the best radio plugger, these people were legends in the industry and we were like minnows. They made us dress different, made our videos more MTV friendly. We were bullied a lot and I hated it."

They found themselves hitting their heads against the wall when it came to releasing their second album, *The Scattering*.

"We recorded the second album and while the first album had been my album, this was the band's album. We were mates, we'd been around the world together three times and Colin had some songs and Frosty had some songs and Kevin was all over it and it was beautiful to see how the group spread their wings and made it a wider sound. But when we delivered it, the label came back and they were like, 'We're not hearing a '(I Just) Died In Your Arms' and the album kept getting pushed back and pushed back."

It wasn't until the label heard 'Between A) Rock And A Hard Place' which includes the '(I Just) Died In Your Arms' cello piece played on the guitar backwards musically that they moved forward. "It was our two fingers up at the label and of course they said that's the single," says Eede. The album also yielded two more singles with the title track and 'Everything But My Pride.'

"That was inspired by something Kevin told me," says Eede. "He had loved only one girl up until then, his high school sweetheart and they dated and got married and then one day he came home to find their place completely empty and he said she had taken everything but his pride. And I thought I can write a song about that."

When *The Scattering* was eventually issued in May 1989, three years after their debut, the band's momentum was lost and the musical landscape was much changed. Power ballads, big hair and slick production was out and in was a more edgy, street sound with acts such as Soul II Soul and Neneh Cherry.

"The record company was focussing on the new urban music coming in and rightly so and I could see that the writing was on the wall."

That third album *Compus Mentus* got a limited release in July 1992. Recorded at Mill Studios in Cookham, Berkshire, with producer Chris Neil who'd worked with Mike And The Mechanics and Paul Carrack, it was helmed by Eede and MacMichael, Eede playing piano and keyboards, MacMichael playing guitar and bass. It features the group's only cover: their version of Jeff Lowe's 'Frigid As England'.

"It's seen as the one that got away," says Eede. "It's Kevin doing his stuff and showing his

genius."The album is much darker than their previous two, titles such as '(Another One Of My) Big Ideas reflecting their gallows humour. Then 'Open Up Your Window', a 1992 previously unissued demo, is a social comment on the Irish troubles and environmental issues.

Soon after the album's release Eede and MacMichael went their separate ways.

"The record company was obliged to put out a single so 'If That's The Way You Want It' was our swan song and it's a really strong song but then we were completely abandoned. We went to Hamburg to promote it. We played the song, we looked good, and then two fat ladies with pink hair and pink poodles came on after us. They were the headliners. I turned to Kevin and I just said, 'I think that's the end of Cutting Crew' and he gave me a hug and we laughed so much and found the nearest the pub."

MacMichael went on to play with Robert Plant's band and write with him too; he sadly died of lung cancer in 2002 and is sorely missed by Eede. Meanwhile, in 2005 Eede resurrected the Cutting Crew name and a reconfigured line up with him at the helm are still going strong today.

"I am absolutely proud and privileged to still be doing it," he says. "Myself, Kevin, Colin and Frosty invented a unique sound, it's not quite English, not quite American, just totally us and we were despised by the UK critics, but the Americans loved us and we went around the world three or four times, had a great time and we have left behind a few great big fish, not just tiddlers, but great big fish" he laughs...

