

Interview PBII

“Maybe we’ll reach younger people too, but we also hope to please our longtime fans”

(January 2010. Text by Henri Strik, edited by Peter Willemsen, pictures by Arthur Haggenburg)

Maybe 2010 is the year of PBII (pronounce: "Pee Bee Two"). This new Dutch band consists of members that formerly played in Plackband, a band once labeled as The Dutch Genesis. This band no longer exists. The king is dead; long live the new king PBII! Guitarist Ronald Brautigam and the new bassist Harry den Hartog found some time to inform Background Magazine about the reincarnation of Plackband into PBII and their debut album *Plastic Soup*.

What was the idea of starting a new band after playing so long together as Plackband?

Ronald Brautigam: “Michel van Wassem and I took the initiative for the change mainly because we wrote most of our music. We worried about the fact that Albert got busier each day with his company. We wanted to evolve with the band while he stated to have less time. It was a hard decision to replace Albert. Through Michel, we got in touch with Harry. While playing our songs it turned out that Harry would bring a new dimension to our music. Combined with the fact that Michel took over the lead vocals, all the pieces fell in place! The sound and the structure of the new songs differ a lot from the Plackband-stuff, so we decided to change the name as well. For us PBII is a new band, a new era and that’s why *Plastic Soup* is not a new Plackband-album, but the debut album of PBII.”



Due to circumstances, a couple of years ago you went to the U.K. without a lead singer. That forced you to let other musicians in the band perform the lead vocals. How important was that event for the start of PBII?



Ronald: “It’s funny you should ask this question. Indeed, I sometimes think this concert was the source of the decisions we took afterwards, but it wasn’t scheduled at all. Sometimes certain events that seem to be a coincidence later turn out to be good for something. It pushed us across a line that we probably would never have crossed if it would not have happened.”

How big was the input of your new bass player Harry den Hartog?

Ronald: “Harry’s interpretation of playing bass guitar differs a lot from that of **Albert de Keijzer**, the bassist of Plackband. Harry has a unique sound that is important for PBII. You can say that Albert is a traditional bass player, while Harry sometimes adds a melody with his instrument. Moreover, he also plays the Roland VB-99-synthesizer. A good example is the song *Fata Morgana* on which he plays the main melody with a sort of Arabic synthesizer flute sound, while John Jowitt plays the bass line. On Heidi Jo Hines’ song *It’s Your Life*, he does the cello part on his bass guitar! This way we have many choices in who’s playing which part. However, Harry is a rock bassist pur sang, as you’ll see during our gigs. On stage, he is a real personality!”

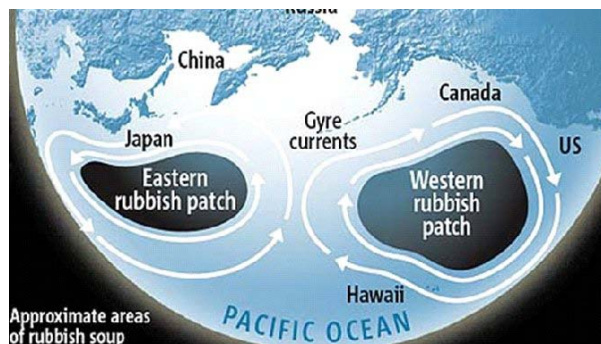
How would you describe your new musical style?

Ronald: "That's difficult to say. PBII is just PBII, but some people say they hear some Frost* in it, others refer to **Porcupine Tree** and the other day someone told me she heard **Kings Of Leon** and **Linkin Park** in our music, hahaha! Maybe we'll reach younger people, but we also hope to please our long time fans too, because the familiar Plackband-sound is still present in our music!"

Harry den Hartog: "For the upcoming gigs we got two Plackband-songs on the set list: *The Good Earth* and *The Hunchback*" "

Can you tell me where you got the album title *Plastic Soup*? What does it mean?

Ronald: "While surfing the web, I found this expression, so I was curious to know what it meant. 'Plastic Soup' appeared to be the name of two gigantic rubbish dumps floating in the Pacific Ocean consisting of plastic junk kept together by underwater currents. These two plastic isles measure twice the size of the United States! Because these plastics are translucent and floating just beneath the surface satellites cannot detect them. As we all know, these plastics remain in the environment and will eventually end up in our food chain. This information touched me deeply, so I convinced the others of the necessity to pay attention to this problem. Finally, we decided that *Plastic Soup* should be the album title. Maybe it will help a bit in getting attention for this severe problem."



Do you really believe your album will help the world? Did you get some sponsoring from Greenpeace?

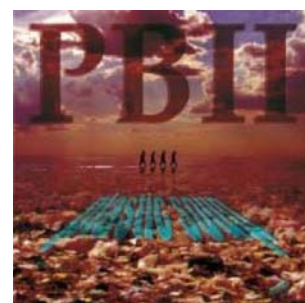
Harry: "We truly believe this album will help people in getting information about this issue and become aware of this problem. Perhaps just a few people, but that's better than nothing. Unfortunately, we didn't get any help from Greenpeace. However, we held meetings with among others, Jesse Goosens who wrote the Dutch translation of *Plastic Soup*. She introduced us to Charles Moore who first discovered the plastic soup in 1997. He also contributed on our album with some voice-overs on a few songs."

Ronald: "In addition, we had a meeting with Stichting Noordzee about this issue and they reacted enthusiastically about our publicity concerning plastic soup and the pollution of the seas and oceans. We also presented an allowance request at the Dutch Ministry for Environmental Issues. We're hoping to get that allowance in order to shoot a video clip concerning the song *Plastic Soup*! This way we're getting even more publicity for the problem and maybe our album will get a bit more attention too."

Sometimes CD-booklets are made of paper that doesn't pollute the environment. However, I think nobody who buys an album will throw away the booklet afterwards. What's your opinion?

Harry: "Well, it would be a bit hypocritical to sing about pollution caused by human beings and then do exactly the same by using unnecessary environmental-unfriendly materials for our album, wouldn't it? Off course we hope no-one is going to throw away our album..!"

Perhaps supporting nature also means stop giving concerts or recording albums, because in both cases you need a lot of energy? Life sometimes is a dilemma, isn't it?



Harry: “Yes, indeed, unfortunately it sometimes is... but if you want to reach people to get them involved in this issue or whatever other important issue, you’ll have to use any possibility to reach your goal. If we only think about this huge problem without acting, it will surely get worse and worse. In this case I think the end justifies the means.”

Does the album contain the three tracks you recorded as demos in 2007?

Ronald: “Yes, they will, but some of them have a different title or contain other lyrics. Of course, the arrangements have been changed more or less, but people will certainly recognize these songs.”

Was the process of recording the album difficult? Why did you include a 5.1 surround version of the album?

Harry: “Recording this album was a learning process for all of us, but luckily we were able to work with rather new recording technologies. In this respect, recording engineer Chris Muller from Holland Spoor Studios was a great help for us. Chris is a real wizard as far as recording is concerned! 5.1 Dolby surround is not very common for CD’s, so that’ll make this album special. It provides an extra dimension to the music and it’s a great experience for the listeners! Besides, we do believe that our music is perfect for mixing it in 5.1. We even recorded a church organ in 5.1 especially for this audio DVD. That really sounds amazing in Dolby-surround!

Can you tell our readers which guest musicians were willing to contribute on the album?



Harry: Yes, we were lucky to have some great guest musicians! First, we have **Heidi Jo Hines**; she’s a singer-songwriter from the U.K. with a beautiful voice. Heidi is the daughter of **Denny Laine**, co-founder of **The Moody Blues** and guitar player in **Paul McCartney’s Wings**. We met Heidi in December 2008 during a mutual gig with **Mostly Autumn** for the Classic Rock Society in Rotherham (U.K.). Our keyboardist and lead singer **Michel van Wasse** made an adaptation of *It’s Your Life*, one of her songs on her latest album.

She was very happy with Michel’s arrangement and immediately confirmed our request to contribute on our album and on a concert at De Boerderij in Zoetermeer (see [review](#)). Arie Verstegen, manager of that venue, introduced us to guitarist **John Mitchell (Arena, Kino, John Wetton, Frost*)** and to bass player **John Jowitt (IQ, Jadis, Frost*)**. They both are amazing musicians who don’t need further introduction for prog heads. We are very honoured and lucky to have them contributing on our debut album and joining the CD-release gig on January 23 in Zoetermeer.”



I read that Kees Bik, the former lead singer of Plackband, wrote some of the lyrics of the album. How did this happen?

Ronald: “We never lost touch with Kees Bik and we always showed interest in the things he did. During our last tour, he came to see our shows, so when we started to write new songs, we asked Kees to write some lyrics. Kees and Harry are now the main lyricists of PBII. Kees wrote the lyrics for three songs: *Loneliness*, *In The Arms Of A Gemini* and the title song *Plastic Soup*.”

Do you intend to record one of your concerts for a live DVD?

Harry: “Yes, we’re going to record the concert of January 23 and we hope to make a live DVD of it. First, we’ll have to save some money in order to fulfill that wish. To record an album or to shoot a DVD is quite expensive, so we hope to sell as much albums as possible in order to finance the making of a DVD.”

How do you think the old fans of Plackband will react after they’ve heard the new material?

Ronald: “Well, to be honest, I really don’t know. It would be ridiculous and unfair to compare us with Plackband, but we could lose some old fans, but without doubt, we’ll get some new fans too.”

From left to right:

Tom van de Meulen:

drums

Harry den Hartog:

bass guitars

Heidi Jo Hines:

lead and backing vocals

Ronald Brautigam:

guitars and backing vocals

Michel van Wasseem:

keyboards, lead and backing vocals



How long do you think this line-up will persist? The last couple of years you had to deal with different line-ups. Mostly lead singers came and went!

Ronald: “Aha..., you’re comparing us again to Plackband, but remember: we’re a brand new band! Anyway, Plackband was unbalanced without a lead singer, but with a lead singer, there wasn’t a balance either. With PBII, we have a perfect balance! Besides, under the guidance of Chris Muller, Michel developed to become a real lead singer in the recording studio. However, we can write instrumentals as much as we want, without a singer getting frustrated. Writing songs has become more relaxed and natural this way.”

How does the future of PBII look like?

Harry: “I’m not a clairvoyant, so we don’t know what the future has in store for us. However, one thing’s for sure: we’re all very enthusiastic to play and we hope there will be a follow-up for *Plastic Soup*, but I don’t expect that album to be an environmental oriented album. It might as well be about any subject you can imagine. The environment is just a possible subject. And off course we hope to perform as much gigs as possible!”

Thanks for answering my questions and good luck with PBII and the new album!

Ronald & Harry: “Thank you very much for being interested in PBII and for asking nice questions!”

