

# STUDIO FILE

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"Who's on the top line?" Clark Sorley asks. He is putting the vocal bracing together for a Klari Katona master tape. That was at least the 10th time the three singers had tried it.

"Me," says Mandy, raising her hand. She is due for a laryngeal nodule operation in two hours time so no one can blame her if she gets it wrong.

"On 'Shine' you're singing E," Clark explains. "It should be F."

He shows her how. She tries again. They all sing together. It certainly works. The music has that extra sparkle.

Clark Sorley is half of

## Sirocco Studios, Kilmarnock

Sirocco Studio's two man band. Musician, musical director and producer as well as engineer he is the presence and much of the inspiration which is giving the Kilmarnock recording unit, a growing reputation.

The link up with Hungarian pop star Klari Katona, a girl with a big international reputation but seeking an entry to the British market, has all the potential Sirocco needs. Unfortunately, Klari has disappeared back to Budapest in a cloud of

influenza and Clark can already see the dream fading, the contract falling apart but he works on with the same meticulous precision.

Although Sirocco goes back only eight years, for 29-year-old Clark, it really all began when he took up piano playing when he was three. With 26 years of music behind him, "That's what gives me my ear," he claims.

In the early '70s, he transferred his musical allegiance and became another

of the thousands of boys with a guitar. He took his music more seriously than most as far as practice and proficiency were concerned but lacked drive and direction. He threw over the idea of a university education and a career in law for his music (no accolades of parental approval here) but considered himself lucky to be playing one gig a month.

He was 'drifting'. Drifting in Kilmarnock is as scintillating as a conversion with a Trappist monk. It lasted six months.

Then he was drafted into the family building firm—"a soul destroying experience"—which

taught him what work was all about and gave him an invaluable insight into business and its organisation.

By 1976 the music scene was showing signs of improvement. An amalgamation of Kilmarnock groups brought some of the best musicians together including Clark and his other half, as far as Sirocco is concerned, sax player and telecommunications engineer, Spike Bain.

Six musicians and two roadies, they travelled Scotland in a couple of builder's vans. Their band and their music were not the height of fashion—punk was in. By comparison, they considered themselves "to a degree more sophisticated" for "we played in tune".

It was a desire to have something permanent to show for their effort—transforming the ephemeral into the concrete—that brought them into recording. There were no suitable facilities in Glasgow so in 1978 they took over two first floor rooms in Glencairn Square, Kilmarnock.

Formerly part of a red sandstone, residential establishment, this was a building in decline. Their neighbours were a french polisher, a plumber and a knitting machine operator. The access alley still runs by the open kitchen door of the Chinese take-away which operates from the ground floor.

The previous occupants had already installed carpet and curtain insulation which was a "wee bit makeshift" but with the thick sandstone walls already proving effective, it's a makeshift pattern they have expanded rather than replaced over the years. Performers sometimes fail to appreciate the natural feedback but recording does not appear to suffer.

They installed their 'live concert' mixing unit and with two 2-track Sony tape recorders they could overdub voices. With a Bank of Scotland loan Sirocco Studios were in business.

"Credibility has always been a problem for someone like me," says Clark Sorley, getting people to "take it seriously."

"Why Kilmarnock?" he was and still is asked. "Why not

## Sirocco, continued

Kilmarnock?" is and was his reply.

If some did not take them seriously, the bands in and around Glasgow certainly did. At £4.50 an hour, they were queuing for recording time. Many were punk groups placing more strain on the studio's equipment than on recording expertise. A number of their customers were destined for greater things, however, and are remembered with a mixture of fondness and pride—Simple Minds, Aztec Camera and Kissing the Pink.

It was all business, however, and by the end of the year they had moved on to 8-track recording and had redesigned the layout. It was a DIY operation. Experience in the building trade and in electronics was proving advantageous.

Two years later they were using 16 tracks and their own music making was bowing out to the pressure of the part-time work load at Sirocco. In the meantime, Clark Sorley had built his last wall, laid his last brick.

Pleading letters to recording and radio companies struck pay dirt. Radio Clyde were, by chance, looking to expand their technical team and Clark found a berth with that successful and innovative commercial station.

At the time, 1979, Andy Park was in charge. Programming was varied and expansive. In the next year and a half, Clark was covering everything from run of the mill station productions to outside broadcasts, from pop music to jazz and symphonies.

Then he went freelance, juggling his time between Sirocco and various outside commitments. Spike continued to work at the studio part-time. Both still found they were recording other people more and playing themselves less than they would have liked. It was a pattern which was destined to continue into 1985 and which nourished the continued expansion at Glencairn Square.

There is still a steady procession of hopefuls gracing Sirocco's portals. Hope, like all else, is subject to inflation but today's Sirocco price is still

one of the cheapest around.

Still with the striving spirit in mind, there are four, rough and ready rehearsal rooms across the yard with three 2-track recorders (Revox, Bias and Teac) available. A second studio currently awaits completion.

The tradesmen have moved out and a lounge, office and kitchen have taken their place. A new pre-production unit has been introduced by agreement with a freelance audio technician seeking a base. He provides the electronics while Sirocco provide the space.

In November, they purchased a new 24-track Amek *Angela* mixing desk and an MC1 *JH 114* multitrack recorder, secondhand from Mobile One. The recorder is not without teething problems. It has a propensity for chewing tape and the autolocate warning lights flash on and off in hysterical abandon, from time to time. Not a situation which will be allowed to continue. The Rebis effects rack with a Yamaha *REV 7* digital reverb, MXR and RDS digital delay lines, an MXR graphic equaliser plus Audio & Design compressor limiters and an Aphex *Aural Exciter* may not be in the same league as many of the larger studios but it competently meets customers' requirements.

"Total Cheatery," claims Clark Sorley of some of the effects at their disposal but concedes that generally, "as technology does advance, the musicians are improving." Everything links up to Tannoy *SRM 15S* monitors, Yamaha, *NS10s* and Auratones.

In studio one, a battery of microphones (Calrec, Shure, AKG, Beyer, Neumann, Sennheiser and Electro-Voice) overcome the problems of insulation and a variety of musical sounds—everything from accordion dance bands and fiddle music to folk guitar, pop and jazz.

Central piece to the casual visitor is the Scheidmayer grand piano, a legacy of days at Radio Clyde, but Clark and Spike are just as likely to be putting sounds together with the two synthesisers (*DX7* and guitar), electric guitar and

bass, the Roland drum machine or the *QX7* digital sequencer.

It all attracts a ready market of musicians and record companies to Kilmarnock. Lismore Records which recently bought record production rights for the Channel 4 *Down Home* fiddle music series, used Sirocco equipment for editing. Folk artist Alistair MacDonald with his own Corban label is another customer as is Gus MacDonald's Klub Records. Klub produces about three pop LPs per year and Clark Sorley nurses an old dream that here might lie an outlet for his own music.

Both men still cling to their musical roots. Spike Bain has recently taken up the saxophone again, preferring the arpeggios à la John Coltrane to the electronic tailoring of other men's music. With a regular job behind him, he can afford to be cavalier, however. "Making money," he said, "is more like playing at Monopoly than life." It is Clark Sorley who has burned his bridges.

In many ways then, Sirocco is at another crossroads. The company must leave their Glencairn Square premises this year. Attempts to obtain a Kilmarnock local authority 'Business unit' have run into red tape supplied by bureaucrats who, as Sorley sees it, cling to an outmoded manufacturing past. A service industry is within their compass but a service industry based on music is an idea which they are taking time to accommodate.

Spike is all for moving out: "West of Scotland culture is a pint of beer," he explains. He sees no real future for himself there.

"Why not Kilmarnock?" Clark Sorley asks. Kilmarnock itself appears to be coming up with the answer.

The Scottish Development Agency is considering initiating a central Glasgow recording complex. Clark Sorley is in on the early consultancy discussions. If it goes ahead, perhaps Sirocco's future will need a move to the city.

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