

Foghat posing with their plane at San Francisco Airport, 1978. L-R: Rod 'The Bottle' Price (guitar), Roger Earl (drums), Craig MacGregor (bass), 'Lonesome' Dave Peverett (vocals and guitar)



Hats off to **FOGHAT** drummer **ROGER EARL**, who's still out there keeping the spirit of rock alive, despite the sad loss of three of his classic-era bandmates. *Derek Oliver* catches up with the heartbeat of one of the greatest '70s stadium rock acts to discover exactly what made Foghat undisputed boogie kings...



LAST MAN STANDING

"HELLO?" THE VOICE ON the other end of the line chirps. "This is Roger Earl and I'm looking forward to my interrogation." Sure, there's something of a mid-Atlantic twang about the accent. But just like Spinal Tap's Derek Smalls, it's still unmistakably British and not without a certain humorous devilment in its delivery.

This is a proud moment for me. Roger doesn't know it, but I've been an admirer of Foghat for more years than I care to remember and the fact that I'm now connecting with a man I've only known from a series of album sleeve pics and from listening to some judiciously heavy tub thumping is very exciting.

Roger is the last surviving member of the classic Foghat line-up. It's a depressing thought, but the ravages of time have decimated the band over the years. Yet despite this, Roger resolutely refuses to down tools and roll over. Together with his manager and wife Linda, he's embarked on a mission to keep Foghat and Foghat music alive, revamping the line-up and playing a succession of dates in the US that show no sign of easing up.

POSSIBLY MY greatest music-related regret in life is that I never saw Foghat play live in the 1970s. It wasn't entirely my fault. Despite being British, the band only played a handful of shows in the UK, though to be fair there was one early tour in 1972 supporting Captain Beefheart that included a gig at the Royal Albert Hall. That always seemed strange to me.

"Well, it was because we were doing so well in the US," Roger explains. "The fees we were getting in the States were so good that we couldn't justify going to Europe and losing money. Our manager and label were both based in the US, and we'd all moved over lock, stock and barrel in the early '70s. It's a shame, but that's the way that it happened."

For Foghat, though, America was a godsend. The band plugged into a country and a scene that fully embraced their gonzo brand of heavy blues rock, a style that easily outflanked other British 12-bar purveyors like Status Quo and the Climax Blues Band. It was also an environment that provided them with wide-screen

radio support, especially when they started to deliver tracks that were not only true to their style, but also accessible enough to register on mainstream charts. By the time Foghat recorded their anthem 'Slow Ride', first released on 1975's 'Fool For The City' album, the blue touch paper had been well and truly lit and the transformation from sideshow curios to real contenders had taken place.

Ignored by highbrow critics, Foghat built a rabid fan following that helped move them from clubs and municipal auditoriums into major concert halls and sports arenas. There was no looking back. Only the endless grind of road work and recordings lay ahead.

"Back in my youth I loved American music," confirms Earl. "When you think about it, it all came from there;

blues, country, jazz, rock'n'roll, gospel, big band swing... it all started in the States. That was why I wanted to live there. It seemed like a magical place."

"MOST OF THE TIME INTERNAL RELATIONS IN THE BAND WERE GREAT. WE WERE THE SORT OF GROUP THAT NEVER COMPROMISED OUR LIVE PERFORMANCES BY GETTING WASTED ON DRINK AND DRUGS. IT WAS ONLY LATER THAT THOSE KIND OF DISTRACTIONS STARTED TO CREEP IN."

BORN IN Hampton Court in south west London and raised in Hounslow in the west of the city, Roger started drumming with a succession of bands - some featuring his older brother and keyboard player Colin, later to achieve chart success with Mungo Jerry

- before eventually joining the Savoy Brown Blues Band. Savoy had done pretty well in the US after recording a string of well-received albums, and it was here that the seeds were first sown for the formation of Foghat, a nonsensical name derived from a childhood Scrabble word created by Savoy's guitarist/vocalist

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Is that a fetching cape Rod's wearing?



'Lonesome' Dave Peverett and Rod 'The Bottle' Price boogieing in front of Roger Earl's logoed drum kit, London, 13 June 1974

'Lonesome' Dave Peverett.

To all intents and purposes Foghat was a Savoy Brown spin-off, formed by Earl, Peverett, and bassist Tony Stevens. Only slide guitarist Rod 'The Bottle' Price hadn't been a member of the band, joining Foghat after a stint with Black Cat Bones. The year was 1971 and their destiny was about to be changed by none other than Bob Dylan's former manager, Albert Grossman.

"Savoy Brown did a US tour with The Nice and Family and we were introduced to an affiliate of Albert's team, Tony Outeda," remembers Earl. "We'd been having problems with Savoy Brown's manager, Harry Simmonds, so we just upped and left. Tony Outeda told us that Albert Grossman was starting a record label, Bearsville, and that he wanted to find an English rock'n'roll band. We set up a little rehearsal, they came over and Albert quickly said, 'Yeah, let's do it'. Afterwards, we went out to a local hotel for tea and biscuits. He was really into food, actually. Later on, I would go to his house and he'd have three fridges rammed with delicacies."

AS IT turned out, being on Bearsville was a rather incongruous home. Grossman was a refined folk connoisseur and his label was based out of the town of the same name, near Woodstock in Upstate New York.

Roger reveals that Foghat accepted the deal because attempts to interest every other label had proved fruitless. And Grossman was really relying on Outeda's recommendation.

"Albert was great to work with," says Roger approvingly. "He was there for us, for whatever we needed; money, advice making the right calls. He was very special."

As promised, two months after signing the deal a \$10,000 cheque arrived in the post allowing Foghat to book Rockfield Studios in Monmouth, Wales and hire Dave Edmunds to produce the band's eponymous debut album.

Roger regards the record as one of the cornerstones of the group's output and feels it owes a great deal to Dave Edmunds' input. 'Foghat' featured the future live favourite, blues musician Willie Dixon's 'I Just Want To Make Love To You'. Compared to the all-out blitzkrieg attack of later releases it's muted, but still has many of the stylings of Foghat's unique and identifiable sound.

Shortly after the album was released Stateside in mid-1972, Tony Outeda telephoned the band to let them know it was being played on US radio and that they should fly over straight away to start gigging.

"We played anywhere and everywhere," recalls Earl.

"WHEN WE PLAYED 'SLOW RIDE' TO THE HEAD OF OUR LABEL, SAYING IT SHOULD BE OUR FIRST SINGLE, HE WAS NONPLUSSED AND DISMISSED IT, SAYING IT WASN'T LIKELY TO BE A HIT AND THAT IT WAS TOO LONG. WE PUT OUR FOOT DOWN AND INSISTED IT WOULD WORK. AND BOY, WERE WE RIGHT!"

"Regardless of the money. That didn't matter to us at that time. In fact, we played the first gig over there [in Oshkosh, Wisconsin] for free, because our visas hadn't arrived."

THE BAND'S 1973

sophomore album, bizarrely also called 'Foghat', is known to fans as 'Rock And Roll' because of its cover pic of a lump of rock and a bread roll! It went gold in the US and contained what would become another live favourite, 'Road Fever', a self-penned track that painted a picture of the band's unswerving commitment to playing as many gigs in the US as they possibly could. It reinforced Foghat's growing reputation as one of the hottest live acts around. By this point, it started to make sense for the band members to move to the US, which was clearly their primary market.

"Myself, Dave, and Rod Price moved permanently to the US in 1973," recalls Earl. "Tony Stevens was living with his mother in north London and he didn't fancy the move." Amazingly, it was only in the '80s that I became



(LONESOME) DAVE PEVERETT ROD PRICE ROGER EARL CRAIG MacGREGOR

aware that Tony Stevens lived a hundred yards or so away from the house where I grew up. He must have passed by my front door hundreds of times. So near and yet so far!

It wasn't until the band's third album that the recognised Foghat sound fully emerged. 'Energized', released in January 1974, showcased a number of choice cuts, including the anthemic 'Home In My Hand', 'Wild Cherry', and 'Honey Hush'. It was a record that focused the band's approach, turning them into an uncompromising boogie machine only rivalled by Status Quo for their brazen, no-holds-barred commitment to pummelling 12-bar rock. It was also the first Foghat album to feature the band's distinctive logo.

Like the 'Rock And Roll' album before it, 'Energized' was produced by a certain Tom Dawes. What was the story there?

"Tom was a friend of our manager Tony Outeda," confirms Roger. "He'd been in a '60s pop band called The Cyrkle, who had a hit with a song called 'Red Rubber Ball'. Tom was a very nice guy and, incredibly, he also managed to get one of my heroes, former James Brown drummer Bernard Purdie, to play alongside me on three tracks from the 'Energized' sessions... I was in seventh heaven." Earl remembers that Purdie played on 'Nothin' I Won't Do' and 'Wild Cherry', but the name of the third number escapes him. "It was a long time ago," he laughs. "I don't know why Bernard wasn't credited for his work on the album. If it had been up to me his face would have been on the album cover!"

In June of 1974 Foghat played a one-off show in the UK at the Rainbow Theatre, London as part of a package of acts being filmed exclusively for Don Kirshner's *Rock Concert* US TV show. Other groups, spread out over four consecutive nights, included Humble Pie, Procol Harum, and the Sensational Alex Harvey Band. So why only play one UK show at this point, Roger?

"It was a kind of arrogance that we didn't play in Europe," he confesses. "Tony Outeda was dismissive of that side of things, and we were earning large fees in the US. Going to Europe would have put a dent in our finances. The other contributing factor in us focusing on America was that our label's distributor, Warner Bros., pumped an awful lot of money into promoting 'Energized'. We had massive billboards on Sunset Boulevard, trade ads everywhere, and huge radio promotion. They also financed a 20-minute movie that was shown in cinemas [directed by Penelope 'Wayne's World' Spheeris]. So that was when things really started to change for us."

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