



Edward the Second and the Red Hot Polkas

The Wikipedia 'history' of E II starts with the band that recorded *Let's Polkasteady* in 1987. But the band had existed for quite a while before that - and recorded and published the 22 tracks on this present CD.

Some time around 1980, a small English dance band was formed in Gloucestershire. It had the rather intriguing name of Edward the Second and the Red Hot Polkas - one of Paul Burgess's linguistic and musical jokes on the word 'polka' often being pronounced 'poker' by older Gloucestershire people, and the fact that the nearby Berkeley Castle was the site of King Edward II's murder by having the said implement inserted in his fundamental orifice.

E II began as being a very typical English dance band of the period - typical in style and format, but a very good example of the genre.

It all started with Dion Cochrane: tenor banjo and Lizzy Howe-Pellant: melodeon, getting together when she played accordion, but she took to the melodeon very quickly, and they started playing spots at the Victory club in Cheltenham. Paul Burgess, Floss Headford, Martin Brinsford and Dave Haines soon realized how good Lizzy was getting on the melodeon, so it was decided to make up a regular band for monthly dances at the club with her as the lead, and bringing in Richard Valentine on piano and as caller. It ran for a year or so in that form.

In the way of bands in general, personnel gradually changed over the years, and in around 1983, Rod Stradling: 2-row melodeon, and Danny Stradling: percussion - newly parted from the Old Swan Band - were asked to join. The other members at that time were Dion Cochrane, John Gill on bass, and Dave Haines on 1-row melodeon.

At the time, some of the band members - particularly Johnny Gill - were interested in reggae music, an interest that soon spread to African roots music. We knew that reggae had followed rocksteady, which had followed mento ... and we reasoned that there must have been an earlier form of West Indian music which blended European dance music and African rhythms.

Many years later we discovered that this terrific dance music had been quite widespread and still exists in St Lucia and a few other islands - there it's called 'Kwadril Music'.

But in our ignorance, we decided to have a go at re-creating this early musical form - to be based mainly on Johnny Gill's reggae-style bass. That is what you hear on this CD. The tracks are taken from three cassettes we recorded at the time. The first, recorded in 1985, was called *Demos* ... sounds rather grand, but it was really only a demo tape to try to get ourselves some gigs.

By the time we made the second one, *Promos*, again just a 5-track promo cassette, in 1986, the band's personnel had changed a bit. Dion had left, replaced by Jon Moore: lead guitar, and we'd added two rhythm guitar players, Tom Greenhalgh (from the Mekons) and our son Barnaby - though they rarely played at the same time. At the end of 1986 we recorded a further 6 tracks which, together with the 5 *Promos* ones were published as *Ethos*. We mused, at the time, about calling our next cassette *d'Artagnan* - but the Cooking Vinyl record company came along with an LP offer, which resulted in *Let's Polkasteady: Edward the Second*, Cooking Vinyl COOK 007, in 1987.

We haven't included any tracks from that record, as it was fairly widely bought at the time, and the band had changed more personnel, developing a rather different sound. They then decided to go 'professional' - and we didn't.

Many of the tunes we played, particularly on the *Demos* cassette, were traditional. Later, we made up some new ones: *Mr Prime's Polka* and *Sophie Bourbon's Hornpipe* by Dave Haines, *The Walls of Butlin's* by Rod Stradling and *Shantey* - a Mekons tune. *Another Fine Mess* was brought back from St Chartier by Dion - and we found its correct name by the time we recorded it again on *Ethos*.

The unusual arrangements were accredited as the responsibility of the whole band - but mainly they were dreamed up by Dave, Johnny and Rod. This is particularly the case with *The Cliffe Hornpipe*, which is scarcely recognisable in the form you hear it here.

These recordings are some 30 years old, made on magnetic tape, and copied onto cassettes for sale. We do not have access to the original ¼ inch tapes, and so these recordings aren't as good as they once were - but they're all we've got. Hope the sound isn't too bad.

Our thanks to original member Dion Cochrane for some of the information about the earliest days of the band - and to him and Lizzy for kick-starting the whole enterprise.

Rod and Danny Stradling - early 2016