

# REPUBLIC MEDIA

Roachford biography - December 2019

Roachford, whose most famous song Cuddly Toy has been a mainstay of radio airplay for over three decades now, is back and about to release what is assuredly the best album of his career in *Twice in a Lifetime*.

“I think that, with this album, I finally get to showcase just who I am - an artist, a songwriter, a pianist” he says. “I never wanted to be a fleeting popstar chasing momentary fame; I’ve always been in this for the music and for the long haul – and I’m still here. I don’t think I’ve ever been in a better place than I am right now.”

Since Cuddly Toy reached number four in the charts back in 1988 - when, at its peak, it was selling 33,000 copies a day - Andrew Roachford has carved out a career for himself as one of the most compelling, and consistent, rock and soul artists the UK has produced. He has released 10 studio albums, several greatest hits collections, has been approached to write for various other artists including Chaka Khan, Michael Jackson and Joss Stone, and toured with contemporaries including Terence Trent D’Arby and The Christians. For the past nine years, he has been part of Mike + the Mechanics, recording with Mike Rutherford’s post-Genesis band, playing live with them across the world.

His enduring career perhaps shouldn’t be surprising, because in so many ways Roachford was born to do this. Raised in south-east London, he comes from a musical family, his father a drummer, his uncle a saxophonist. Teachers at school were concerned he was never entirely present, that his mind was forever drifting elsewhere.

“They were right,” he clarifies now, laughing. “I was thinking of music.”

He was out on the road with his uncle from the age of 14, and by 15 was working in a studio with The Clash. In his early 20s, he signed a seven-album deal with Columbia, and would go on to be one of the label’s most successful acts for the next decade with a string of hits singles and international success (including in America).

He is someone who channels the energy of James Brown before going on stage each night, and who, on record, summons up the spirit of everyone from Al Green to Joe Cocker. When he sings, you listen.

And he is always performing, always playing live somewhere.

“I like to improvise,” he says, “so no two shows are the same, and even when I play the old hits, I always play them differently, so I never get bored, and neither, I hope, does the audience. I like to think I know how to interpret a room, how to connect with a crowd, and I always give it 100%. The moment the music starts up every night, the moment I walk out onto a stage, I’m right there, I’m completely inside it.”

This was how he came to the attention of BMG - by playing live, most recently with Mike + the Mechanics, where he introduced himself to an entirely new audience. The record label approached him after one show, palpably dazzled by just how visceral a performer he was, and how clear it was, too, that he had so much more to offer. They signed him on the spot.

“All I ever wanted to do was make great music” he says. “I suppose I’ve always been quite muso in that respect. It’s never about the fame, the moment in the spotlight; it’s about the work. I’m inspired by people like Elton John, Stevie Wonder; those artists who endure. The desire to write and perform has never left me, and the gift has never gone away.”

*Twice in a Lifetime* is the album he’s been gearing up to make for decades. It’s the sound of someone at the top of their game, of one who knows his craft inside out. Produced by Jimmy Hogarth, who has previously worked with Paolo Nutini, Duffy and Amy Winehouse, and featuring several members of Winehouse’s band, it’s full of grit and the most tremendous sonic energy, tracks like *Are You Satisfied?*

# REPUBLIC MEDIA

throbbing with Stax-era musicality and soul. Lyrically, meanwhile, the album reveals an artist who has unambiguously Lived A Life.

“Songs are a kind of therapy,” he says, “and they are my way of looking back through the lessons I’ve learned. Sometimes, I just think that my material comes from the imagination, but then I take a closer listen to them and realise that they are actually inspired by real-life events - mostly mine.”

He offers an example in the track Love Remedy. “That’s about opening up to someone and allowing that person in. It comes from a place where you can find yourself feeling a little lost. We all feel a little lost in life, right? Well, sometimes we need help finding our way back again, we need someone with the right attitude to help shift things along.”

While another track, High On Love, echoes Womack and Womack in both its celebration of the purity of love but also the acknowledgement that love can often come from a dark place, the brilliant Won’t Think Twice is about those lessons we learn from relationships we have conspired, often unwittingly, to break.

“Won’t Think Twice is about how, given another chance, I wouldn’t be as reserved as I was, as held back. I suppose it’s about finally being ready to be a grown-up in a relationship.”

While he sings each song with the untrammelled enthusiasm of someone holding a microphone for the very first time, it’s clear that the emotional depth of each song costs him. It isn’t easy, he concedes, to reveal quite so much of yourself publicly, but then that’s what makes them resonate so much.

“When you dig deep into yourself, the songs that come out tend to be brutally honest,” he says. “I sometimes think that it’s easier for me to be more honest and open in song than it ever would be in normal conversation.”

Another album highlight is the track What We Had, a duet with Beverley Knight.

“We’ve had a similar journey over the years, me and Beverley, both of us from a black Caribbean heritage, both of us with similar stories, and a lot of shared experiences. We’ve had to go out there and bang on a lot of doors during our careers, and I really admire Beverley a lot, I love her warrior spirit.”

In the autumn of 2018, Roachford’s doctor found lesions on the singer’s vocal cords, and the operation to remove them was complicated. For someone who had been using his voice as his primary tool of communication for over 30 years, this was bad news.

“The funny thing was,” he says, “I never really considered myself just as a singer before. I always thought of myself as a musician who sings.” When it did return, his voice was stronger and richer and prompted in him a belated realisation. “I realised I’d better start treating it with care. I just took it for granted before, and I take full responsibility for that.” He smiles “And actually...as a singer I wasn’t too bad.”

In the 12 months since his operation, this master of understatement has to all intents and purposes been reborn, a phoenix from the flames. Just listen to his vocal performance on the album track The Truth Hurts Too Much, which aches like a bruise and soars like the songs Aretha Franklin used to inhabit.

And so, in 2020, Andrew Roachford finds himself writing and recording the best songs of his life. He’s come a long way from his school boy reveries, and the giddy chart success of Cuddly Toy, with his deep-rooted desire to work at his trade and to make great music ever-present and never stronger.

Those efforts have been duly noted: earlier this year, he was awarded an MBE for Services to Music.

He’s a survivor, too, and it’s the survivors in this game that make the best music, those whose work is not mere artifice, but rather the real deal. He has little intention of stopping any time soon. “The Rolling Stones are still going, aren’t they?” he chuckles.