



*the fat lady singl**e**s*



*(& opera obscura)*

# the fat lady sings

The National Stadium, Dublin, 1990: The Fat Lady Sings face a sell out audience in their hometown. The band can't contain themselves. The evening is threatening to overwhelm them. With emotions running high both on and off the stage singer Nick Kelly's introductions are proving as warm and affecting as the songs. It reaches a peak with **Arclight**. As Nick sings you can hear a pin drop. No one wants to miss a breath, no one wants it to end, people still remember.

On a business level the band's achievement is as impressive as the show itself. They have sold out Dublin's premier venue, the place the 'big International bands' play. They will soon repeat this in London's equally cavernous Town and Country club. Their other UK tour dates are also all sold out. And, remarkably, they have done all this without having as yet signed a record contract, an act which many, particularly those at record companies, would tell you is impossible.

For singer Nick Kelly the path to these shows had started in New York City in 1985. He had gone there to take some time out from his legal studies before a presumed return to the real world. However, once there, emboldened by his anonymity in that great city and possibly with a little Dutch courage he found the nerve to sing and perform in public. It was an experience that would set him on a whole new path in life. He returned to Dublin with only one thought in mind: form a band.

Hence in 1986 The Fat Lady Sings began to take shape. Initially it was Nick on vocals and guitar, Robert Hamilton on drums, Dave Sweeney on guitar and Finbarr O'Riordan on the bass. But Dublin proved to be no New York. Awash with English A&R men determined to find another U2, hopefully identical to the first, it was a quite small scene and, after the adventures of New York, a claustrophobic one at that. It was decided to decamp to London.

Within five months of leaving Ireland a single **Fear and Favour** had been recorded and released. Paid for by the band itself it was put out on the legendary Good Vibrations label, the label that had also released The Undertones classic **Teenage Kicks**. Critical reaction from the UK music press was immediate and overwhelmingly positive and spurred by this the band, operating independently, began to build a live following in both the UK and Ireland.

Line-up changes followed. First, Dubliner Dermot Lynch joined, graduating from backline technician to bass player. Then, in 1987, Tim Bradshaw was introduced to Nick at London's Marquee club. It was a key moment. Classically trained, Tim's contributions on guitar and piano were essential, but it was his versatility with a wide range of other instruments that would give TFLS a huge edge. The line-up that would storm Dublin's National Stadium was complete.

A second single **Be Still** was released in March 1988 on Harbour Sounds records and a third in 1989, the now classic **Arclight**, was issued on the band's own Fourth Base record label. By this stage both public and critical interest were greatly increasing. A fourth single **Dronning Maud Land**, released in January 1990, brought the simmering pot nicely to the boil.

The sell-out shows in Dublin and London were the clinchers and in 1990 the band signed to East West Records in London and Atlantic in America. Nick, whose songwriting powers were now much admired, was rewarded with a publishing contract with Island Music. The man who had once sung nervously in a New York bar, was suddenly given the free rein (and the record company tour support) to sing nervously in venues the world over.

Tours of Germany with Diesel Park West, of Canada with Spirit of the West and of the UK with Hot House Flowers quickly followed and with them some 'on the road' TFLS

L-R: Nick Kelly, Finbarr O'Riordan, Robert Hamilton, Dave Sweeney





*L-R: Robert Hamilton , Tim Bradshaw, Dermot Lynch, Nick Kelly*

mythology. One story has it that drummer Robert Hamilton woke one morning to find his mattress on fire. Thereafter the German promoter insisted on playing Midnight Oil's **Beds are Burning** prior to each TFLS performance. Similarly the unreliability of the band's vintage tour vans, 'Gloria Esther' and 'Sherpa Tensing', became the stuff of legend.

It was at this point that TFLS first appeared on my own modest music industry radar. My own band, Something Happens, had also just signed a record deal and was starting to tour the UK. During one radio interview somewhere in the UK midlands, I found myself arguing defensively that there were

more bands in Ireland than U2. A presenter cut me short to chip in cheerfully "Yes, of course, there's TFLS as well, they're brilliant, play in a club up the road all the time."

My sense of discomfort was further heightened by another presenter who waded in with further ringing endorsements of the band and an astonished "I can't believe they're Irish." The words left unspoken but deafeningly apparent in the room that day was that TFLS were too good to be Irish. We made our excuses and left. In the months that followed graffiti as to TFLS's excellence adorned every dressing room we encountered.

TFLS's major label debut, the single **Man Scared**, was released in October 1990. It was followed in May 1991 by the album **Twist** which spawned three more singles: a re-release of **Arclight** (April 1991), **Twist** (May 1991) and **Deborah** (August 1991). All were greeted enthusiastically by press and public alike. The album release was followed by a year of worldwide touring. **Twist** performed well in the British and Irish charts and also provided the band with their first ever American success when **Man Scared** entered the US alternative chart.

TFLS gigs at this point were heady affairs. Checking them out reluctantly at the time (rivals and all that) I was struck by the sheer warmth of affection both on and off the stage. This was a band that loved playing and greatly appreciated the audience's part in making the gigs special and memorable. Nick later likened their live show to a 'Mobile Saturday Night'.

Musically the band was quite different to the norm at the time. This was an era when the 'Madchester' scene held sway and those bands that didn't like a 'Loose Fit' were generally a reasonably heavy variety





of metal. TFLS were neither. They were quite simply a songs band who, aided by Tim Bradshaw's instrumental versatility, would shape their sound to suit whatever the songs required. Hence **Man Scared** became essentially indie guitar rock, **Arclight** epic power pop, **Deborah** country-rock and **Dronning Maud Land**, of all things, a waltz.

At the heart of the songs lay Nick Kelly's lyrics: witty, observational and always totally honest. He appeared to be both as uncomfortable in a man's skin (**Man Scared**) as he was at times too comfortable there (**Deborah**). It was an awareness of the male condition that males and female could relate to. Nick Hornby couldn't have put it better, but then Mr Hornby didn't have TFLS as a foil.

In 1992 the band made preparations to record their second album **Johnson** with producer Steve Osborne. Just prior to the recording Robert Hamilton departed to set up the 'Peace Together' charity with Ali McMordie, a venture that would later see Peter Gabriel, Sinéad O'Connor, Nanci Griffith and Fergal Sharkey perform on a new version of the band's song **Be Still**. He was replaced for the recording by Nic France. On stage the now-three-piece were augmented by Steve Crease on drums and flamboyant keyboard player Alastair Artingstall.

**Johnson** was released in June 1993, again to widespread public and critical acclaim. Three singles were released: **Show of Myself**, **World Exploding**



**Touch** and, most notably, **Drunkard Logic**, which gave the band their highest ever UK chart placing. The release was followed by a punishing six months of touring that culminated with a storming pre-Christmas show in New York's punk mecca CBGB's.

Then in January 1994 it was announced to a disbelieving fanbase that Nick Kelly had split the band. It appeared to be a strange and even shocking decision. TFLS had seemed to have everything - great songs, a great live act, and they'd accomplished the transition from their earliest 4-track outings to the polished sound of **Johnson** with aplomb. Their singles were getting ever closer to that elusive international breakthrough hit and they were committed to exhaustive heavy touring.

It turned out that this last activity was their undoing. Gigs may be great to play, but touring is an arduous and sometimes soul-destroying affair. Nick had become painfully aware of all that it was taking him away from the lives of friends and family unfolding without him. "There comes a time" he remarked later "when the realisation hits you that your friends are falling out of love with each other, falling in love with other people, having children, losing loved ones and you're never there when it happens."



L-R: Dermot Lynch, Tim Bradshaw, Nick Kelly

Happily the following years were kind to TFLS members. In 1995 Tim Bradshaw and Dermot Lynch reached the US Top 10 playing with American band Dog's Eye View. Dermot subsequently enjoyed success as a session bass player, then went on to become one of the UK's most sought-after tour managers. Tim continued to bring his multi-instrumental and production talents to numerous artists, most significantly David Gray. And, after an 18-month break, Nick Kelly began to write and record again. His first solo album **Between Trapezes** was released to ecstatic reviews in 1997, and he was voted 'Best Irish Male Singer' at the 1999 Irish Music Awards, with Van Morrison and Christy Moore trailing in his wake.

His second solo album, **Running Dog**, released in January 2005, again firmly underlined his reputation as one of Ireland's best songwriters.

But listening to these songs now, even at this distance in time, or perhaps more so because of it, it's easy to see how heart breaking the decision to split the band must have been. Nothing ever really occupies as special a place in your heart as your first love and for The Fat Lady Sings the songs on this album are very much the fruits of that first love.

Sleeve notes tend to present cold, hard facts but the songs are never either. They are the band's warm beating heart. The singles here run chronologically and hence capture first footsteps, early hopes and the band's gradual progression to more pristine sound and professional recording. More importantly though they capture that wonderful process of Nick Kelly trying to make sense of himself, the world and his place in it. It was a wide-eyed questioning that was intoxicating to watch and hear. With Nick you always felt it could be you up there, you struggling to approach that girl, you trying to 'shine like an Arclight'. Listen and enjoy, they were a most excellent mobile Saturday night.

Tom Dunne  
March 2005



## cd 1 singles

### 1. **Fear & Favour** 4.01

Nick Kelly  
Island Music Ltd.  
© 1990 Warner Music UK Ltd

### 2. **Be Still** 3.03

Nick Kelly  
Cold Harbour Recording Company Ltd  
© 1990 Warner Music UK Ltd

### 3. **Arclight** 4.11

Nick Kelly  
Island Music Ltd  
© 1989 Warner Music UK Ltd

### 4. **Dronning Maud Land** 3.33

Nick Kelly  
Island Music Ltd  
© 1990 Warner Music UK Ltd

### 5. **Man Scared** 2.44

Nick Kelly  
Island Music Ltd  
© 1990 Warner Music UK Ltd

### 6. **Twist** 4.41

Nick Kelly  
Island Music Ltd  
© 1991 Warner Music UK Ltd

### 7. **Deborah** 5.13

Nick Kelly  
Island Music Ltd  
© 1991 Warner Music UK Ltd

### 8. **Show Of Myself** 5.10

Nick Kelly  
Island Music Ltd  
© 1993 Warner Music UK Ltd

### 9. **Drunkard Logic** 4.20

Nick Kelly  
Island Music Ltd  
© 1993 Warner Music UK Ltd

### 10. **World Exploding Touch** 4.04

Nick Kelly  
Island Music Ltd  
© 1993 Warner Music UK Ltd

## cd 2 opera obscura

### 1. **Boil** (Scaffell Pike Mix) 5.44

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 1993 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 2. **Behind Your Back** 4.18

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 1989 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 3. **Border Keep** 3.50

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 1993 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 4. **Creepy Baby** 5.25

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 1993 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 5. **What Are You Like?** 3.42

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 1993 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 6. **Broken Promised Land** 5.07

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 1993 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 7. **Momento Mori** 3.01

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 1991 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 8. **Blue Flames** 5.31

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 2005 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 9. **Contact** (Live) 6.19

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 1993 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 10. **Johnson** 3.01

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 1993 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 11. **Grand Country Wedding** 3.47

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 1991 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 12. **Horse Water Wind**

(Unreleased Single Re-Mix) 5.54  
Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 2005 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 13. **Heavy Duty** 3.49

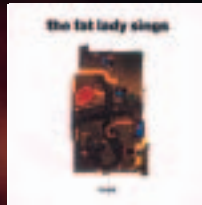
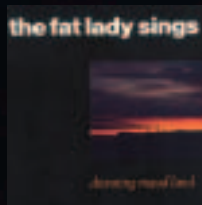
Nick Kelly / Robert Hamilton  
Island Music UK Ltd. / Copyright Control  
© 1991 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 14. **These Three Words** 3.50

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 2005 Warner Music UK Ltd.

### 15. **Everywoman** (Live) 3.20

Nick Kelly  
Island Music UK Ltd.  
© 2005 Warner Music UK Ltd.



**Nick Kelly** (vocals, guitars, piano)

**Tim Bradshaw** (guitars, piano, keyboards, organ, violin, harmonica, mandolin, accordion, percussion, backing vocals except Track 1 / CD1)

**Dermot Lynch** (bass, keyboards, backing vocals except Track 1 / CD 1)

**Robert Hamilton** (drums, percussion, backing vocals on Tracks 1-7 / CD1, Tracks 2, 7, 11, 13, 15 / CD2)

**Dave Sweeney** (guitar on Track 1 / CD1)

**Finbarr O'Riordan** (bass on Track 1 / CD1)

**Nic France** (drums on Tracks 8, 9, 10 / CD1, Tracks 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12 / CD2)

**Steve Crease** (drums on Tracks 9, 14 / CD2)

**Alastair Artingstall** (keyboards, backing vocals on Track 9 / CD2)

**Steve Osborne** (keyboards, percussion, backing vocals on Tracks 8, 9, 10 / CD1, Tracks 1, 8, 12 / CD2)

**Juliet Roberts** (backing vocals on Track 8 / CD1)

**Candy McKenzie** (backing vocals on Track 8 / CD2)

Track 1 / CD1, Tracks 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 14, 15 / CD2 produced by The Fat Lady Sings.

Track 2 / CD1 produced by The Fat Lady Sings & Gary Wilkinson, engineered by Gary Wilkinson.

Tracks 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 / CD1, Tracks 2, 13 / CD2 produced by The Fat Lady Sings & Mike Roarty, engineered by Mike Roarty.

Tracks 8, 9, 10 / CD1, Tracks 1, 8, 10, 12 / CD 2 produced by Steve Osborne, engineered by Paul Corkett.

Tracks 7, 11 / CD2 produced and engineered by Paul Hardiman.

Track 9 / CD 2 recorded live at the Mean Fiddler, London March 19th, 1993 mixed by Tim Bradshaw, engineered by Paul Corkett.

Track 15 / CD 2 recorded live at the Mean Fiddler, London, March 19th, 1993.

Track 1 / CD1 engineered by Paul Thomas

Tracks 3, 4, 5, 6, 14 / CD2 engineered by R. Digby Smith.

All songs words and music Nick Kelly, except Track 13 / CD 2 (words and music Nick Kelly / Robert Hamilton)

All songs published by Island Music Ltd, except Track 2 / CD 1 published by Cold Harbour Recording Company Limited and Track 13 / CD2 published by Island Music Ltd. / Copyright Control.

**Arclight** video directed by Angus Cameron.

**World Exploding Touch** video directed by Angela Conway.

Cover photograph by Kevin Westenberg.

Band photographs by Kevin Westenberg, Mark Baker, Sarah Lewis, Julie Cook & Zoran Orlic.

Sleeve Design by Rachel Gutek / guppyart.

The Fat Lady Sings were managed by David Stopps for Friars Management.

The Fat Lady Sings would like to thank all those who played with, worked with, supported and helped us between 1986-1994. In particular, we'd like to express our sincere appreciation to:

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We'd also like to thank the following people for their help in releasing this compilation:

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Executive producers of this compilation:

Nick Kelly & David Stopps.

