



Nick has lived all over the world
but is a Sussex boy at heart

‘I’ll be known for one song forever – it’s my mistress’

He was the front man of Cutting Crew who topped the charts with the iconic power ballad (*I Just*) *Died In Your Arms* but 40 years later Nick Van Eede, who lives in Hastings, insists he’s more than a one-hit wonder

WORDS: Jeremy Blackmore

Cutting Crew scored a massive international hit with 1980s power ballad (*I Just*) *Died In Your Arms*. Yet while its success has taken its composer and singer Nick Van Eede all around the world, he has seldom strayed far from his Sussex roots.

Today, almost 40 years since he first wrote his signature song, Nick, 65, is relaxing at home near Hastings, reminiscing and explaining how excited he is about a new Cutting Crew boxset *All For You – The Virgin Years 1986-1992* (available on Cherry Pop records). The set brings together all three albums the band recorded for Virgin, including 1986’s Grammy-nominated *Broadcast*, and a host of bonus tracks.

His house is an hour’s drive from the home he grew up in that was ‘always full of music’ by the village green in Nutley, on the southern edge of Ashdown Forest.

‘It would be Granddad sitting there, playing the piano badly, but he was a violinist,’ he says, pointing.

‘And Dad was amazing. He was a builder, but his hobby was collecting records. When he died, he left 9,000 singles. They’re up in the

cupboard at Mum’s. One day I’ll buy one of those jukeboxes to play them.

‘It was a great house. There was always classical music being played and whatever my Dad had.

‘He was amazing. He’d buy anything from The Buzzcocks to Jim Reeves! Very eclectic!’

As a teenager, Nick went to school in East Grinstead where he also bought his first singles at Grays Record Shop.

Offered a place at Warwick University to study English and drama, he spent the summer beforehand in 1978 working at Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead, first pushing trolleys and then, when another member of staff fell ill, being promoted to assist with the lights and sucker bottles in the operating theatres despite only having A level biology to his name.

In between hospital shifts, Nick was playing gigs in The Guinea Pig pub.

One day, after dropping off his son for an operation, Chas Chandler, former bassist with The Animals – who later managed Jimi Hendrix and Slade – walked in on one of Nick’s performances. ‘I don’t know whether people who have been discovered, be it actors, >

or other musicians, whether it happens like that, like in the movies,' says Nick.

'But I've had two or three of those things happen in my life, and they were totally life-changing moments.

'That, that man would come into that little pub in East Grinstead on that Thursday night, when I had a pub chock-full of doctors and nurses, all singing along.

'He could have come in the night before and I might be talking to you about Nick's repair shop!'

Chas left his card and suggested Nick, then 20, gave him a call.

Two weeks later, he was supporting Slade in Poland and any plans to go to university were abandoned.

Essex and Hot Chocolate. Support roles, but important ones, all the time honing his stagecraft for what, hopefully, was around the corner.

After three solo singles which failed to chart, Nick formed local Sussex three-piece band The Drivers in 1982 with friends bassist Mac Norman and drummer Steve Boorer, who quickly secured a cult following.

'Again, Nutley! A pin drop in the middle of Sussex, but it had a pub called the Shelley Arms,' he explains. 'Everybody who knew anything about pub music in the early 1980s will remember the Shelley Arms very fondly. It became our hub.

'Then it spread out to Uckfield, to Haywards Heath, then all the way to Brighton.

who made an immediate impression. 'Kevin's band Fast Forward supported us on tour.

'They were 10 times better than us, but they weren't crazy like we were. They were very composed, played properly.

'We were just like Freddie and The Dreamers mixed with Squeeze!'

The pair became firm friends and agreed to get together if ever their respective bands broke up. Eight months later, in 1985, Kevin flew into London and they set about forming a new group together.

Later joined by Martin 'Frosty' Beedle on drums and Colin Farley on bass, they began rehearsing and cutting demos.

(*I Just Died in Your Arms* was one of the batch of demos Cutting Crew sent round to labels. Did he know immediately the song was special?

'By then, I'd probably written and published, maybe 30 or 40 songs and written 100. So, I wasn't a baby. I knew what a good song was. It had something about it.'

Nick laid down his vocal in front of legendary Beatles producer Sir George Martin at his famous AIR studio in London, but even then, he wasn't expecting success to follow.

'Of course, you're pre-disposed to failure by then,' he reflects. 'I was 28, so everything you do, even though you've got a great band and these great songs, Terry Brown producing, and George Martin sitting there watching, you're constantly predisposed to thinking: "This isn't going to happen."

'The moment I remember thinking we might be onto something, was mixing it in a studio where there were a lot of other musicians. People were going: "Who the heck are you guys? What's this song?" The engineers were getting their friends to come in and listen. So, something was boiling.'

Released in 1986, (*I Just Died In Your Arms* topped the charts in the US, Canada and Scandinavia and reached the top five in the UK and many other countries.

Cutting Crew even played to a US television audience of around 80 million people on a special anniversary edition of Johnny Carson's *The Tonight Show*.

Did having such a colossal hit with their debut single bring a lot of pressure?

'It's [always] the elephant in the room,' he admits. 'We're known for one song forever. It's a gigantic song that will never go away.

'It's my mistress. It's my bank manager. I love it. I still love playing it.

'In America, we had a proper career. But mostly, around the rest of the world, it's just that one song, especially at home. We sold more albums in Norway than we did in the UK. Because this was the first place they released it. They couldn't wait to release this single. I said, we haven't finished the album yet. They said: "No, no, we've got to get this single out." So, we released the single and there was no album.

'But by the time we were in Norway, Japan and Australia, the album was out and then

'The moment I remember thinking we might be onto something. People were going: "Who the heck are you guys? What's this song?"'

'You can't make that up, can you? Two weeks later, I was playing to 15,000 people in Katowice and Gdansk. It was remarkable.

'Slade taught me – in that crazy three or four months – everything about being a performer I didn't know.

'About fun, about getting out there and really giving it and not staring at your shoes. Noddy Holder and that gang were amazing. Of course, they roasted me. They cut the legs off my stool one night. It was real initiation time, and I kind of loved it.'

Chas Chandler secured Nick slots on tours by several big-name acts including David

'We became a kind of cult. Nobody really knew who we were. But everywhere we went, we would put 250 people in the room.'

Fate intervened once more when Bernard Solomon, who founded short-lived Canadian Dallcorte label, caught a performance and offered to sign them.

A month later the trio flew to Toronto to record an album at Morin Heights, Quebec and scored a 1983 Canadian hit single *Tears On Your Anorak*.

During two years in Canada, Nick met local guitarist Kevin MacMichael, later his key collaborator in Cutting Crew and someone



PHOTO: COURTESY OF WARNER MUSIC

Nick has never tried to write another (*I Died*) *In Your Arms*



PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER MUSIC

The unknown band were suddenly topping charts worldwide

you sell albums. Then you become a proper *bona-fide* act.

'So, the pressure is, can you write another *Died In Your Arms*? I didn't try. I just wrote lovely songs for every moment of my life. But the pressure was there.'

Follow-up album *The Scattering* barely dented the American charts and Cutting Crew sensed musical trends shifting from power ballads towards R&B.

Their final album, 1992's *Compus Mentus* never received a proper release, so Nick is proud to see it take its place in the new boxset.

When Cutting Crew went their separate ways in 1993, Nick wrote and produced for other artists while Kevin worked with Robert Plant – among others – before his tragic early death from cancer back home in

Canada in 2002. Nick has fond memories of his old friend.

'Every moment, every note, every lyric he was part of, he would be my foil.

'He had no ego. He would literally just do anything you wanted. He was a singer in his band. He let me be the singer in Cutting Crew. He could have sung half of the songs. He never did.

'He was a beautiful man. Very well read. He taught me a lot. I stayed with him for the last six months of his life and it was a privilege.'

In more recent years, Nick has resurrected the Cutting Crew name, releasing two new studio albums and touring regularly with a new line-up of Cutting Crew.

He is also composing a new album and writing a novel. These days he and his wife

Nikki foster rescue lurcher dogs and can often be found walking them on Camber Sands.

'I lived in Toronto and in London for a while, but I've always been a country boy.

'We're not far from Camber Sands. You see a greyhound run on those sands when the tide's out, it's a scene of beauty.'

He stops to reflect. 'I'm not a good car mechanic or painter, but I am a good songwriter. So, sometimes you've got to remind yourself why you're on this planet.

'I've given my whole life to music. And thank goodness it just keeps giving back to me.' ●

Cutting Crew's *All For You – The Virgin Years 1986-1992*, a three-CD boxset, is available for £24.99. cherryred.co.uk