

Monday 14th July 2014

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. The cancellations are coming in, schools are breaking for summer. I want to know where you're all going, we all do. Please think about writing a newsletter of your holiday – we would love that!
Well.... Royal Oak Farm is back on the block and we have their purple mange tout, their broad beans, fresh peas, beetroot and rhubarb in the bags this week, depending on which medley you have.

Broad Beans and Potato Pesto Pasta

500g dried pasta

200g shelled broad beans

handful toasted pine nuts

450g new potatoes, cut in large bite-sized chunks

4 tbsp basil pesto

Parmesan cheese, optional

Fill a large pot with water and bring it to the boil. Drop in the broad beans and cook for 5 minutes, or until tender. Turn the oven onto a low heat for warming food. Put broad beans in a large bowl and put in the oven to keep warm. Add the potatoes to the saucepan and boil until tender, then add them to the beans in the oven. Add the pasta to the boiling water and cook until tender. Add the pasta to the bowl and toss in the pesto, adding a little cooking water if the mixture looks dry. Serve scattered with the toasted pine nuts and Parmesan, if using. Great with a fresh crispy salad.

I thought I was having a very bad dream on Friday when I found myself sitting at my piano with a pencil behind my ear. But it wasn't, it was really happening. The idea of writing a song is horrific to me but there I was banging out the chords, scribbling away at lyrics. God help me. I'd decided it was now time to finish my unfinished business. I decided I was going to go back to my 100 plus back catalogue of songs which never saw any light of day. I would deconstruct them, strip everything away back to the hook riffs and melodies, get rid of my voice, give them a good scrub and reconstruct them, sex them up into dance songs for other artists. I know I have at least 20 potential hits in those songs, probably more, in fact they all are.

I told my brother what I was going to do and that I was worried I would never find a brilliant producer in this part of the world. I was finally doing something sensible as far as he was concerned. Farmaround was a ridiculous idea, who on earth eats vegetables. Izzy Lane was a recipe for bankruptcy, it had no business model. Good Food Nation was worse still. Swaphopper which I am imminently launching, he gets really angry if I even mention it because he thinks it's so utterly ridiculous. But getting my songs sorted out, now he thinks I've finally come to my senses. So much so that an hour later my inbox started filling with emails from him of links to music producers in the North. I went through them. I guess there was only one who I would have dared bother with as I simply don't have time to waste. He'd worked with The Cure, done 'Friday I'm in Love' and the 'Wish' album and various other named artists and as I have 'indie' roots I thought I'd get on with him, and he'd also done dance stuff which is my intention.

We arranged to meet in a pub I know half way between here and Leeds. I had shivers running down my spine at the idea of being back in a recording studio. I had visions of me walking in and who'd be sitting there at the mixing desk 'my tortured soul'. "WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING BACK HERE YOU *****. I THOUGHT I DUMPED YOU 20 YEARS AGO". Then I reminded myself I wasn't going to be going back into the creative process, well only superficially, and I didn't have any demons to expel, only birds and butterflies. I'd already done the suffering to get those melodies, lyrics and hook lines and this was going to be a mechanical process of deconstruction and reconstruction. I remember when I stopped the music and started Farmaround, I had a recurring dream of being in a recording studio and I was mixing vegetables - increasing the volume of the cauliflowers, adding more bass to the carrots, adding some reverb to the courgettes, bringing the potatoes down a bit. My subconscious trying to manage the transition I guess.

With one hell of a sense of dread I set off for the meeting. The pub was closed. The producer followed me to the next village and before going in I suggested he listened to some stuff so I played him half a dozen songs – he was deadpan and listened intently. I think he got them. When we started talking, I discovered that he's one of us, he's in the family, he was a Farmaround customer for 4 years. I asked him how it ended and was it squashed tomatoes. No, it was a new kitchen and growing his own and he'd loved the produce.....phew. When I started The North Circular with Lily Cole and Katharine Poulton, I discovered that Katharine was a Farmaround customer. I'll get round you all eventually!

We decided which song to start with and which artists it would be suitable for. It's a great song with very commercial lyrics, great melodies and great chorus – he was going to go off and start programming, find the groove. OkKylie!

I got home and someone had been to repair and tune my baby grand piano, I'd left them at it. It had been unplayable since I've lived up here. It had been bashed about in storage, set ablaze in an arson attack in Farmaround premises in Forest Hill and it was full of leaves. It was my father's piano, he'd bought it from someone above a jellied eel shop on the Fulham Broadway just after the war. It's a bit of a wreck now but I wouldn't use anything else. He was a great pianist and it was heart-breaking when his hands became so gnarled with arthritis that he couldn't play.

I sat down and wrote my first song for 20 years. And guess what.....I think it's a hit!! Kylie's voice wouldn't cut this one though as it leaps two octaves in the chorus – much more Katy Perry. But that wasn't part of the plan. The plan was to work on songs which had already been written, not write new ones. I am seriously not happy about it.

I hasten to add that I can't play the piano, I am not a pianist but I can use it to write songs apparently. I've never wanted to be very good at anything, just good enough to just about scrape by. I have absolutely no interest in being a virtuoso anything – I couldn't think of much worse.

To be honest, I'm finding the whole thing a bit disconcerting. I'll probably start getting that dream again in reverse. But as it's what I'm doing, I'm going to have to get used to it. I just really don't want to find myself writing another song that's all. The producer said that music is like malaria – once it's in your blood it never leaves you.

Kind wishes, Isobel

PS I'm getting myself in such a state about all this, I feel like I'm going to have to go and write another song. Take Kylie's 'Can't Get You Out of My Head' - the perfect pop song. Well Cathy Dennis was probably going insane when she wrote that to get that lyric and that melody but during the course of production – getting it grooving and popped out – it doesn't sound like it anymore - but I bet you she was. It's like my new song. I went through great suffering to get the melodies and lyrics but I'll be kicking out the piano chords, laying down the groovy bass line (done that already), get the dance drum track rolling, go back and adjust the vocals over the track, sort out the dynamics with keys and guitars – all with my new producer, of course. It will be a perfect pop song, devoid of the misery that created it.

Anyway, have a go at the 'Broad Bean and Potato Pesto Pasta' !