

# EXORCISING GHOSTS: STRAWBS & OTHER LIVES BY DAVE COUSINS



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## **About the Author**

Dave Cousins has recorded over 250 deeply personal and spiritual songs and published the lyrics as 'Secrets, Stories & Songs'. In 2002 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in recognition of his work in music and radio.

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How did a working class boy from West London come to discover Sandy Denny and Rick Wakeman, work with iconic figures like David Bowie, Dickie Attenborough, and Dame Vera Lynn; meet royalty; change the face of commercial radio; and be granted God's abundant blessings by The Pope?

Exorcising Ghosts, written by Strawbs singer and songwriter, Dave Cousins, tells an extraordinary story from the revivalist folk scene of the 1960s, through chart-topping albums and singles, to stadium rock shows of the 1970s.

Dave Cousins spares no punches in the untold story of his discovery of Sandy Denny in a folk club in Earls Court and their time together in Denmark. He invited the unknown Rick Wakeman to join Strawbs, and within six months they moved from playing in folk clubs to headlining the Albert Hall.

The subsequent incarnation of Strawbs found pop stardom with the notorious hit, 'Part of the Union', which ended in an acrimonious bloodbath in Los Angeles. Undeterred, Dave Cousins recast Strawbs as a prog-rock band, playing stadium shows across the USA and Canada.

In 1980, Dave Cousins turned down the chance to sign to Elton John's record label and entered his secret life - the nascent world of commercial radio.

Like a rollercoaster, Dave Cousins' life has had its ups and down, but what a ride!

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## About the Author

Dave Cousins has recorded over 250 deeply personal and spiritual songs and published the lyrics as 'Secrets, Stories & Songs'. In 2002 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in recognition of his work in music and radio.

## Most helpful customer reviews

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

"IT'S BEEN UP AND DOWN, BUT, ALL IN ALL, IT'S BEEN A GOOD LIFE." DAVE COUSINS.

By Stuart Jefferson

First, I don't know why Amazon says this book isn't released until Dec. '14 when they're selling it now, and

not as a "pre-order". Hmm. I was lucky enough to have sent to me the British edition published by Witchwood Media about a month ago, so I've had some time to read and digest this book. I assume that the layout is identical between the editions.

For whatever reason The Strawbs (and The Strawberry Hill Boys) never appear in any of the music magazines that still care about music. Why? Who knows, but Strawbs fans now have a book worthwhile from someone who knows all about the group.

Beginning with a concise overview of Cousins' early life--school, jobs, etc.--the book shifts to music with Cousins meeting Tony Hooper, and discovering skiffle great Lonnie Donegan, and forming his first band, The Gin Bottle Four, a standard two guitars/washboard/tea chest bass set-up. His first album purchase was a 10" LP of "Jack Elliott Sings", with a pressing of 99 copies. But the music left a lasting impression on Cousins. He talks about the folk scene in the 1960's in England, and his newly formed band The Strawberry Hill Boys (try to find their oop 2 CD set), the name coming from a friend's flat in Strawberry Hill. The group passed the BBC audition, appearing on "Saturday Club", and also began to get a few other gigs.

For fans of The Strawbs Cousins talks at some length about the music of the period along with all the people that crossed his path--Sandy Denny, Pete Townshend, David Bowie, Rick Wakeman, Marc Bolan, Dave Swarbrick, and a number of others, both in and out of the music scene. It was during this time that the band's name morphed into The Strawbs because at the start of a gig someone yelled out "The Strawbs are here!", and the name stuck. From playing small clubs, in less than a year they were playing the Albert Hall and recording a string of albums.

It was also the time when the band changed from a folk band to a more prog/rock sound which Cousins talks about in some depth. There's also insights into his songwriting, and how his outlook changed over the years playing with the band. For fans of the band (like me) this is some of the most interesting parts of the book. The Strawbs never seem to have gotten much publicity like other relatively well known groups of the era, so it's nice to finally read about the various permutations of the band and their music.

In the 69 chapters (one of which is devoted to an interview with Cousins and David Bowie), each a few pages long, Cousins' life in and out of music, especially his time spent in commercial radio and running a club is laid out. He talks about the band's albums, beginning with 1969 "Strawbs" album, and the shifting dynamics between band members. "Dragonfly" saw personnel changes with Cousins labeling the album "acid-folk", which despite mixed reviews, sold pretty well. From that point the band's sound began to change with electric instruments into something closer to a progressive music band.

Reading this book, with all the musical changes Cousins talks about, is almost like listening to the band's albums chronologically. Fans will know what Cousins is saying about various songs and albums, and that's where the book is most interesting to me. His work in radio is a sideline to the main focus which is the band and their music. And fans will get some insight into Cousins and the band that no one else is in a position to tell like someone who was there.

The book has 16 pages of b&w and color photos in two sections which shows Cousins' life in music. Cousins has had ups and downs in life--both in and out of music--and he lays it out in his rolling, easy to digest, honest style. Fans of the band will want to read this book because it's the inside story from someone who was there from the beginning. As the title says, Cousins does exorcise a few ghosts along the way, and his story is worth reading.

7 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

A great read. S

By Mr S K Jones

A must for all Strawbs fans, from start to finish including the intervening years, I think a truthful account of the volatile music industry the ups and downs. from the heart, from a very modest and honest man. Cousins nails this one to a tee. Still going strong.. long may it last,! A great read.

S.J 2nd Oct 2014

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Long-time Strawbs fan here. Cousins' stories are revelatory in ...

By S. W.

Long-time Strawbs fan here. Cousins' stories are revelatory in their detail and in the bluntness as told. Such stories centering largely around the author himself can sometimes come across as self-congratulatory or aggrandizing. This is not the case with Cousins who can sometimes seem painstakingly honest and self-deprecating at times here involving his personal foibles here. The stories about interactions with other artists of the era and the ups and downs of a band trying to break into the upper tier of label artists is well-worth reading. The other part of this book covers the largely unknown career that Cousins had in radio programming, licensing, etc. in Britain. That too will provide some keen insight for many, myself included. Those details are the icing on the cake in this book. The cake is the story of Dave Cousins, the origin and up-and-down career of the Strawbs, and the details about creative process involved in creating music by Cousins, the Strawbs, and those people and situations encountered along the way throughout the journey.

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