

discover that this was Tom's 18th birthday and that Tony had to leave The Electric Soft Parade's recording on *Later* to attend the infirmary. Suffering from severe wrist pains, he was told he had a broken arm. In January last year, he contracted shingles and the pains returned. After numerous tests, Waldenstrom's was diagnosed on April 30th. Attacking the lymphatic system, this condition assaults 3 in a million unfortunates, making Tony the first recorded case in Sussex – as he would undoubtedly expect.

Now undergoing chemotherapy, Tony appears half the weight he was six months ago. Yet none of the steel to carry on as normal, to wring the last drop from every single day he is given, has left him. He is still breezing around town in his trademark sheepskin coat as he always has, making circuits of anywhere that sells music to buy and sell records and spot any opportunity of local promise.

Bolstered by a strict, largely self-designed diet of - amongst other unconventional foodstuffs - apricot kernels, shark cartilage and a whole pineapple every morning, he continues to do what he has done for four years – keeping all who have grown to be inspired by his unbending faith in his boys informed of their every move. It's possible that we know what they're up to before they do, but in sucking in everyone he possibly can, Tony ensures that Tom and Alex have that extra player. It's impossible not to be impressed and even a little moved by such devotion.

Although having had to take his foot off the pedal – but only due to his treatment schedule – Tony is still very much actively managing the band, attending meetings wherever needed, often straight from a hook-up to a drip containing toxins. Attempting to arrange a photo session, he informed me he “can't do Wednesday; I'll be in Brussels, but only for a day.” Thursday was fine.

For a man suffering from an incurable, unpredictable and progressively debilitating blood cancer, his energy is bewildering. It should be said at this juncture that The Electric Soft Parade is now not Tony's only musical concern. There is also The Upper Room, who he confidently predicts will be massive this year. The woeful Kinky Journo aside, we have no reason to doubt him.

He is also heavily involved with Actress Hands and Ali Gavan's new project Diomedes, investing in each as much time and passion as his E.S.P day job and failing health will permit.

As someone who has endured four months of a full-on chemo regime for a coincidentally rare, but curable cancer, I can relate entirely to what Tony is going through physically, but am at a loss as to how he is piling into life as he is. Such bull-headedness to get the fuck on with it is rare, so should be respected and applauded.

Though undeniably amplified by his current situation, Tony Richardson has already earned his place in local legend. He knows it, revels in it, and is very proud of what he, Tom and Alex have achieved to date. Citing the disciplines and teamwork ethics of his rugby career as the foundations for everything he has learned about how to successfully manage a rock band, he delights in relating their subsequent experiences in lofty rock circles. Name-dropping is part of the spivish shiftiness of this engaging character, so there are few around town that don't know of when he met Isaac Hayes or had lunch with Thurston Moore. He even claims that Alan McGee considers his “the greatest rock ‘n’ roll story of all time.” “So what? I'm lucky enough to meet a lot of interesting people,” he retorts in defence.

So, on he ploughs in his direct, part Peter Grant, part Del Boy manner, steering all

of his boys as high as they can go whilst relishing the prospect of an imminent stem cell transplant. He won't stop until he is stopped, it seems. It's apparent that when that could be is of no concern to Tony, as there is still a lot of rock 'n' roll to be overseen and heroes to be told how shit their business is.

"I just thought everybody else was wrong," he says again of the key to his triumphs, "and still do." Let's hope that one day soon this will refer to his confounded doctors. That *would* be bizarre.

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