

## NEW GIGS, NEW ALBUM, NEW WORLD PARTY

### Karl Half A Head hosts a new World Party

**Five World Party albums in 20 years might not be a great record... but every one of them was a great record and now the party is starting all over again.**

4 years ago, Karl Wallinger's World Party fell apart. He had terminated his long deal with Chrysalis Records because of their handling of the *Egyptology* CD release (this CD included the hit "She's the One"); without his knowledge, most of his band and his former label manager produced a near identical version of his song to win Robbie Williams the Brits "Single of the Year;" his manager and mentor, Steve Fargnoli, died of cancer; and then Karl had an aneurysm.

It seemed like Karl Wallinger's 20 year old ship of fools was scuppered, taking with it one of Britain's finest musical treasures. Now, despite feeling like his head's been sawn in half, (which, incidentally, it has) Wallinger and World Party are back on the campaign trail. He's regained control of his voice, his legs, his warped sense of humour and **his music catalogue**. He's launched Seaview Records and is playing South By South West in Austin this year. *Dumbing Up*, the album that only received a partial UK release four years ago, has been remastered and repackaged with two new tracks, new graphics and a DVD of intimate World Party action. There may even be life for the bizarre comedy concept, Seaview TV.

World Party? A social-democratic ideology? A good time for all? A better name than "The Karl Wallinger Band"? In the mid-eighties Wallinger walked out of cult heroes The Waterboys and launched World Party with a surprising hit album and US hit single, "Ship of Fools". *Private Revolution* charted in America, proving that 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy could be set to good tunes and sell. It was never a prolific project, but through five educational and entertaining albums, World Party carried the torch for intelligent pop and outstanding live musicianship. Eclectic in every sense of the word, World Party took its leads from Beatles, Dylan, The Beach Boys, The Stones, Junior Walker, Neil Young, Prince, and made the music its own.

It was Wallinger's ability to turn his fanaticism for great '60s music into fresh material that persuaded Ensign Records, Nigel Grainge to sign him up and give him total creative freedom and his own studio. "I was looking for a place to record *Private Revolution* and ended up in this eight bedroom Georgian rectory in Woburn," he remembers. "The estate agent said an artist named Eddy was caretaking the place for the Woburn estate but that he might let me use it. I gave him a bit of rent and it was fantastic. I was 28 and making my first record, with my own band. There were these 12 white doves living in the roof, like the spirits of the nuns who lived there long ago. Their presence had a dualistic nature. On the one hand, there was the beauty of watching them fly together in circles over the house and neighbouring fields. But on the other hand, these doves just shit everywhere, blocking up the drains. Eddy and I were always running around trying to stop leaks."

With the success of *Private Revolution*, the World Party estates grew to include Seaview, an ironically named loft space in a Victorian warehouse with a panoramic view of London. Always the chief architect, Karl drew on the talents of engineers and producers such as Prince's Paisley Park engineer, Joe Blaney. "It was like having my own Abbey Road," he

says animatedly. “It was always an apprenticeship and I got these guys in so I could learn from them as well as benefit from their work.” A yet more accomplished second album resulted.

*Goodbye Jumbo* won the first ever Q “Album of the Year” award in 1990, was nominated for a Grammy and had hits with “Message in the Box” and “Way Down Now”. The third release, *Bang!* was only held off the number one spot in the U.K. by R.E.M. The success attracted collaborations with the ancient music of the Dufai Collective, the soundtrack to *Reality Bites* and a track in *Chueless*, plus a world music project with Peter Gabriel, Joe Strummer, The Terem Quartet, Iggy Pop, Nigel Kennedy, and a tribal chief from Sarawak who played a one note flute. Karl’s became a name to drop in educated musical circles.

Flushed with success, Karl became the classic sharp-witted, sharp-tongued, selfish, reluctant, brilliant, hilarious, eccentric mix up that we expect of all true artists. “Listen to all the best music and you know that whoever wrote it was off his trolley. I never wrote a good song while I was straight.” he says, chain smoking despite doctor’s orders. But Karl has rarely listened to expert advice.

Contrary to its suggested democratic principles, Wallinger’s World Party is a whimsical dictatorship and the messages in the lyrics are definitely his. The party ethos has drifted as his philosophical allegiances have shifted. *Private Revolution* mirrored Dion Fortune’s *Cosmic Doctrine*. *Goodbye Jumbo* was Karl’s take on Carl Jung. *Bang!* was a paean to Bertrand Russell, with the single, “Is It Like Today” a four verse précis of “A History of Western Philosophy”. Everything and everyone involved with World Party was drawn in to realize Karl’s ideas and ideals. Photography, graphic design, video concepts and musicianship were conducted by Wallinger, driving a furrow through musical and artistic trends with a self-assured swagger.

On tour, the rolling troupe of players that appeared as World Party gave the impression of a real band but it was always Karl’s project. Early member credits were given to imaginary characters such as Millenium Mills, in reality a factory near the studio. But everyone invited to World Party band membership was hand-picked for his/her humour and artistic versatility. “I’ve always written sort of compilation albums by lots of artists so I needed people who could come with me on those journeys, not because the music was complex but because it was wide ranging. I wanted to try to get a group of people who were fun to be with and good players.”

The kudos acquired through World Party membership, plus the fact that they never had a real stake in the Party, has made them attractive targets for artists seeking musical credibility. So, perhaps it’s not so surprising that many of these players took the industry shilling; writing, producing and playing to help rocket Robbie Williams to stardom. It’s a curious truth that in many ways, Williams’ career was created as the big company view of what World Party should have been. Still more a backhanded compliment was the fact that “She’s the One”, a song Karl wrote for a film of the same name became the shining hit of Williams’ album *Escapology*.

Of course it would be churlish to draw attention to the fact that the World Party album from which they culled “She’s the One” was called *Egyptology*, wouldn’t it? “*Egyptology* was a dark pun on my mother’s death,” says Karl. “Searching for the mummy. But I also wanted to have an “ology” in the album title.” It was acclaimed by most critics, as usual,

but behind the scenes Ensign had been absorbed into EMI, Nigel Grainge had left and World Party was left out in the cold. Seeing Karl, his kids and his band wading knee deep across muddy Glastonbury, carrying their own instruments to a dripping and electrically lethal circus tent while Robbie headlined on the main stage just about summed it up.

Battling on, Karl recorded the delicious *Dumbing Up* and released it on Chris Wright's Papillon label. He played a couple of U.K. dates to promote the album but while on holiday near Cambridge he complained of a headache and collapsed, waking up days later in Addenbrooke's hospital, unable to speak.

Waller—like World Party—is a contradiction. He can be very, very angry and very, very funny but the trials and tribulations of the last few years have left him wittily sanguine. “I was so lucky that Robbie recorded ‘She’s the One’ because it allowed me to keep going. He nicked my pig and killed it but gave me enough bacon to live on for four years. He kept my kids in school and me in Seaview and for that I thank him.”

It has also given him time to regroup – if World Party could have ever been called a group. He won back the rights to his entire catalogue from the marketing men at EMI, Arma Andon offered to manage him and start Seaview Records with him, Universal offered him a sexy distribution deal for the entire catalogue and the South By South Festival in Austin invited him to play for the first time in almost a decade. To all of these he said yes. “Big Blue Ball”, the Peter Gabriel/Waller world music project is, as Karl says, “Still in the chocks. But Stephen Hague has done a lot of mixing work on it and it might soon come out.” And Seaview TV, 3 billion channels of digital dementia for the small screen may yet expose the talents of Blogdan Blinovich, John Spanky, B'Daste Corby and Ringo the Dog. The half a head man may yet conquer the world and you're all invited to the party... Subscription forms available on [www.worldparty.net](http://www.worldparty.net). Welcome to the Future.