

Glenn Tilbrook - Biography

“I’m not reinventing the wheel / I just like the way it makes me feel,” Glenn Tilbrook sings on his latest release *Transatlantic Ping Pong*.

When the wheel in question is the perfect three-and-a-half minute pop song, Tilbrook is a certified patent holder and member of that elite group that includes such tunesmiths as Lennon & McCartney, Ray Davies and Elvis Costello. As one half of the songwriting ampersand behind the beloved band Squeeze and now a successful solo artist, Tilbrook has perfected a signature style marked by brilliant melodic invention, cheeky humor and slice-of-life pathos, all wrapped up with unshakable hooks and his golden boy tenor. From chestnuts like “Up the Junction” and “Pulling Mussels (From the Shell)” through stunning new tracks “Untouchable” and “Ray and Me,” he has amassed a veritable Sears Catalog of memorable songs.

After the release of his solo debut, 2001’s *The Incomplete Glenn Tilbrook*, he hit the road, making his bid to become the new hardest working man in show business. For three years, he ping ponged between Europe and the U.S. He burned up the tarmac in a 1987 Cruisemaster RV (Hey, James Brown never did his own driving!), wowing audiences with solo acoustic shows that combined rousing sets, spontaneous requests (Is there a song Glenn doesn’t know?), fast-paced humor and parking lot sing-a-longs.

“The thing I love most about playing solo is finding I could talk to an audience rather than just saying ‘This is’ and ‘That was’ and ‘Thank you very much,’ which was probably about the extent of my communication before then,” Tilbrook says. “It’s great, if you’re in a band and you’re powering through a set, that’s sometimes all that you need, but I love talking to people in this new kind of environment.”

During spare moments, Tilbrook began to lay the groundwork for solo album number two and as the title suggests, *Transatlantic Ping Pong*, it came together on both sides of the pond. “The recording was done in short bursts,” he says. “The Nashville stuff was done in August, and the rest of the stuff I did in England in February. And then I took it back to my studio, and worked on it in Austin and New Orleans. I worked on it all over the place. I worked on it in my RV, in a field, in the middle of nowhere!”

If a vocal session in the middle of an open field hints at a more relaxed approach to record-making, that’s in keeping with Tilbrook’s sonic vision for the project. He says, “What I wanted to do was approach it with a much more live feel and to keep it a lot simpler. And also, to go back to quite a basic approach, which is something I haven’t really done for a while. To properly look at the songs, but to also keep it simple. That was very invigorating for me to do. All the songs that we did were arrangements that we worked on at the most two days before we recorded them. So it was very fresh. On quite a few of the songs, it’s a live vocal, and it really captures what was happening in the studio.”

What happened in the studios is a tantalizing smorgasbord of styles and textures, from the power pop wallop of “Untouchable” and percolating funk of “Lost in Space” to the whipsmartaleck sass of “Hot Shaved Asian Teens” and the dreamy reflections of “Ray and Me.” There’s even a Ventures-like instrumental, “One for the Road,” as a good-humored parting shot. The scaled-back live band approach, with its splashes of Farfisa organ and bracing electric guitars, harkens back to the days of *Argybargy* and *East Side Story* - a warm, friendly sound that will undoubtedly please ardent Squeeze fans.

Tilbrook comments, “I don’t really see a dividing line between Squeeze and what I’m doing now. Squeeze was a band, and though we changed members, whatever the line-up was became Squeeze. Now, this new album feels like a band album. Everyone put their ideas in. But it’s under my name, because my name is the biggest thing I have to advertise myself. It’s certainly nowhere near as big as Squeeze. But there’s very much a continuity flowing through everything from Squeeze to the stuff I’ve done. Live, I don’t feel that I *have* to play the old songs. I *want* to play them. I want to dip into all parts of my career because I’m proud of it.”

It was with the same openness and affection for the past that Tilbrook reunited with songwriting ex- Chris Difford for the moving “Where I Can be Your Friend,” their first collaboration in five years. Tilbrook: “After Squeeze fell apart Chris had said a lot of things about how he wanted to apologize to me, and it was very sweet. I really love Chris and I felt sorry for him that he felt so bad. Now we’re in a different place, and I think we realize what we do and don’t want to do. Chris and I are really at a stage now where we are rekindling our friendship and that’s a great place to be. We’ve got such a lot of history together.”

Transatlantic Ping Pong is the latest chapter in a rich history that spans Squeeze’s explosion out of the late ‘70s new wave movement to their continued presence on FM radio with staples such as “Another Nail in My Heart,” “Tempted,” “Black Coffee in Bed” and “Hourglass” and through their influence on contemporary artists such as Blur, Weezer, Aimee Mann and Fountains of Wayne.

As Glenn Tilbrook prepares to turn another page in his storied career, hitting the road with his three-piece band The Fluffers, he says, “I’m very happy with this record. My hopes are that more people get to hear it than heard *The Incomplete*. . . I always like to get across to more people, but I’ve learned to live with the possibility that that might not happen. But nevertheless it doesn’t in any way dent my enthusiasm for carrying on doing it, because I really really enjoy it.”