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Biography

## SQUEEZE

Squeeze. There's something about this band, even the mere mention of their name, that simply inspires affection in their audience. They're those Chris Difford/Glenn Tilbrook songs, of course, these guys weren't compared to Gilbert and Sullivan or Lennon and McCartney for nothing. And there's the overall attitude; Squeeze manages to be both clever and heartfelt, at once thought-provoking and feet-moving. This is and always has been a uniquely fresh band, and with *Babylon And On*, their eighth A&M album, Squeeze has reaffirmed the qualities that have set them apart since they were formed some dozen years ago.

*Babylon And On* is actually the third name for this, Squeeze's first new studio recording since 1985's *Cosi Fan Tutti Frutti*. *Five Angry Men* had been considered, but when keyboardist Andy Metcalfe, who had been touring with the band for several years, became an official member (along with guitarist/singer/songwriters Tilbrook and Difford, pianist Jools Holland, drummer Gilson Lavis, and bassist Keith Wilkerson), it would have become *Six Angry Men*, and somehow that just didn't sound right. Nor did *Life In The Bus Lane*, another possibility, so *Babylon And On* it is.

Squeeze's colorful and sometimes turbulent history began in 1975 when Difford, Tilbrook, Lavis, Holland, and bassist Harry Kakoulli formed the band in their native England. Their earliest recording, a three-song, independently-released EP, led to a contract with A&M, followed by a regular succession of acclaimed albums: *U.K.* (released in the U.S. in May, '78); *Cool For Cats* (March, '79); *Argy Bargy* (March '80); *East Side Story* (May, '81); *Sweets For A Stranger* (April, '82), and the *Singles - 45's And Under* compilation (November, '82).

Despite the critical acclaim, as well as success in the U.S. on tours with the likes of Blondie, the Tubes, and Patti Smith - culminating with a sold-out headlining show at Madison Square Garden in June of '82 -- management problems and regular personnel changes (by 1982, only Difford, Tilbrook, and Lavis remained from the original band) eventually took a toll. In late '82, the demise of Squeeze was announced with a terse statement which noted that "the band as a horse has run its course, and the jockeys are considering new mounts."

Difford and Tilbrook went on to form a new duo, Jools Holland formed his own band, Jools Holland and the Millionaires, and Squeeze was history. After two solo albums with the Millionaires, Holland went on to become a major U.K. television personality as host of the live, weekly music show "The Tube." He also participated in the Prince's Trust birthday party celebration, with a line-up that included Eric Clapton, George Harrison, Boy George, and Ringo Starr.

The breakup lasted until early 1985, when a one-off charity performance by the original band (joined by bassist Wilkinson, a member of the Difford and Tilbrook lineup) convinced them that the time was right for a reunion. In August, '85, they release *Cosi Fan Tutti Frutti*, and Squeeze was back.

Two years later, the band members regard *Cosi* with mixed feelings. "I thought it was very much like Squeeze's first album, in a way," says Difford. "We went into the studio and recorded lots of brave things; then afterwards, you sit back and learn from the mistakes you've made.

"The enthusiasm for *Cosi* was very high. We'd only been back together for a month or two, we were getting on extremely well, and everyone was excited about what we were doing. But I think we ignored the fact that the best thing about the band is the *live*-ness of it."

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A&M Records Inc  
Press Department  
595 Madison Avenue  
New York NY  
10022  
Tel: (212) 826-0477

A&M Records Inc  
Press Department  
1416 N La Brea Avenue  
Hollywood CA  
90028  
Tel: (213) 469-2411

Tilbrook agrees. "We were all so excited about being back together that we didn't put all that much thought into how we'd do the *Così* album," he says. "We figured our enthusiasm would carry us through. And we did have a lot of fun making the record, but we were rarely actually in the room playing at the same time. We were determined this time to make an album that would be a little less involved; we wanted to make sure, for instance, that we could play all the songs live."

Helping Squeeze achieve that end on *Babylon And On* was co-producer/engineer Eric Thorngren. Whom the musicians had gotten to know during the *Difford And Tilbrook* album re-mixing. Thorngren, whose previous credits include work with Talking Heads (*Stop Making Sense*, *Little Creatures*), Robert Palmer (*Riptide*), and others, was "brilliant," says Chris. "He set me on fire with his imagination.. In the end, he became a member of the band, in the same way that George Martin became a member of the Beatles. It's a great relationship."

Difford, the group's lyricist, spent the first half of '86 writing for *Babylon And On*. His aim: "to keep things simple. I started out writing in a cottage in the country, working from 9 to 5 every day, like an actual job. My ambition was to keep things as uncomplicated as possible."

Tilbrook mirrored those efforts in the music. "I thought I could write simpler songs that wouldn't take so long to learn how to play," he notes. "I also found myself coming out of the closet as a guitarist, after a few years of not wanting to play guitar at all, especially on record." Overall, adds Gilson Lavis, "One of the things we kept in mind was avoiding being self-indulgent, the idea was to keep things to a bare minimum, in terms of production, writing and arrangements. There is no meandering."

Of course, the Squeeze trademarks, from the cornucopia of musical hooks to the carefully observed lyrics, are in ready supply. Difford's skill at what one critic called "dense, picturesque, short story-ish writing" comes through in songs like "Cigarette of a Single Man," inspired by an afternoon spent in a London pub. "I was watching one chap who looked very lonely and depressed, with his cigarette just sitting in the ashtray...He'd let it sit there, then light another before the first one had burned out. It was the cigarette was his only friend."

Other tunes – "Wedding Bells," "Footprints in the Frost," "The Waiting Game,": "Striking Matches -- seem too to have an air of melancholy reflection and gentle regret. "There are certain times when I tend to look back at the rest of the year and think, "Well, what have I done with my life?" Difford confesses. At that time I suppose I was regretting not doing enough, really, and that comes out quite a bit in the lyrics." But there are hopeful songs as well, like "Splitting Into three," which addresses both divorce and reconciliation; and for humor, look no further than "Some Americans" or "85305937," which updates the classic telephone song by way of the answering machine.

Most of all, says Tilbrook, *Babylon And On* is an album that represents Squeeze as they really are. "It's probably the first album we've made in years that actually represents what we sound like. We've been waylaid, through our own faults, by the technique of making records, and it's gotten the better of us in recent years. That's not the case this time. I think we're all regarding this as our best LP ever."