



Photo: Edd Westmacott / Retna

The Family Business

Larry Jaffee

ONE OF MY FONDEST concert-going experiences remains British folk rock guitar idol Richard Thompson on-stage at New York's famed, now-defunct night club The Bottom Line in the early 1990s.

It was some time during either "Calvary Cross" or "Night Comes In" – I can't remember which (both develop similarly in a funereal tone and climax) – when he launched into a cathartic electric solo that was so transcendent, it appeared that levitation was going on in the room. As Thompson was exorcising his or someone else's demons on his Stratocaster, I could have sworn the hairs on my arms were sticking straight up, as if I was struck by lightning. Or at the very least, I had goose bumps. The SRO audience of 400, who, like me, remember it vividly and rewarded him with a minutes-long standing ovation.

Both songs rightfully are included on Shout!Factory's recently released *Walking On the Wire*, a four-disc boxed-set career, the third time a large retrospective attempted the daunting task of presenting his impressive

body of work, but the first time it's been laid out chronologically.

Thompson spoke exclusively with *The Audiophile Voice*, as did his ex-wife Linda and two kids Teddy and Kamila, who are following in their parents' footsteps in the industry. All gave separate interviews over the course of 18 months, and have recent music that needs to be heard. They do guest artist bits on each other's records, and occasionally appear on stage in live performances at benefits.

Patriarch Richard's equal adeptness on electric and acoustic guitar, not to mention keen songwriting skills in describing various states within the human condition and male/female relationships, leaves him virtually peerless in the singer/songwriter game, as you can hear from the box's well-selected 71 songs from 34 albums.

To wit: The Irish Elvis Presley groupie who follows her hero "From Galway to Graceland" or the witless lover who's been cheated on in "I Misunderstood" or the ode to a vintage motorcycle in "1952 Vincent Black

Lightning." That rare combination of slice-of-life storytelling and extraordinary musicianship will always find an audience for Thompson's uniformly excellent recordings, even if the same people always seem to be buying them. Not a great singer but better than Bob Dylan, particularly now that Dylan's has gotten so rough, Richard knows a very great deal about vocal phrasing, as he belts out "Now my name it is Mulvaney / And I'm known quite famously" from "Cooksferry Queen."

It's midway through *Walking's* third disc that the sound of patriarch Thompson's recordings became as good as the writing, especially the third and fourth albums pristinely produced by Mitchell Froom (four tracks from *Rumor and Sigh* and five from *Mirror Blue*). The quality continues on the three tracks from his last studio album, 2007's *Sweet Warrior*, the best of which is the Iraq soldier's tale "Dad's Gonna Kill Me."

Thompson's first professional band, Fairport Convention, set the bar for British folk rock in the late 1960s. His tenure with the band is represented on the first CD of the new Shout!Factory collection, showcasing his developing song-writing prowess such as the acoustic ballad "Genesis Hall" about squatters' confrontation with the law. No music collection will be complete without Fairport's album *Liege & Lief*, which probably should have provided here the Celtic murder tale "Tam Lin," which is conspicuously absent. That song provides a blueprint for the aforementioned epic solos.

Richard notes that his hilarious, self-deprecating stage banter developed early on as a defense mechanism when no one else in Fairport wanted to speak between songs.

Bolting from Fairport, which continued on without him, Thompson recorded a mostly forgettable debut solo (three songs represented here from *Henry*, *The Human Fly*). He then formed a partnership with the sweet-voiced Linda Thompson, his future wife. A smattering of their output fill out the rest of Disc One and most of Disc Two. Their musical partnership lasted for an eight-year run and six albums, the best being the first, *I Want to See The Bright Lights Tonight*, and the last, *Shoot Out the Lights*, the latter

which coincided with the breakup of their marriage and contained how-could-it-not be autobiographical songs like the title track of the box set.

A few years ago Island dug out of the archives a U.K. release of a live 1975 Compact Disc that captures Richard and Linda's early stage show, providing their American roots influences.

Richard tells *TAV* from his California home a story about when they were a family unit and how it's not surprising Teddy became a professional musician.

"When Muna (Linda and his oldest daughter) and Teddy were kids, I remember them sitting in the back of the car. They kind of agreed that Teddy would be the musician and Muna the manager."

Linda tells me in London in late September the morning after Kamila's six-song showcase with band at the famed Troubadour club in Earl's Court, London, that Richard's decades-old story "is all entirely possible. I'm sure that it's true. [Muna] was always ordering Teddy around." Teddy, who was also in the audience of Kamila's gig, says he doesn't remember the incident (he was fairly young at the time), but finds it amusing.

Richard picks up the story, "Although Muna really liked music, she didn't have the interest or the drive. You have to have the drive to be a musician."

In contrast, after Teddy picked up the guitar for the first time when he was nine, "there was little question what he'd do as an adult."

His father notes that Teddy was never the greatest student in school, where he was encouraged to pursue music and acting. He points out that the kids were also influenced by their mom,



who raised them in England. Meanwhile, Richard became a Brit transplanted to Southern California in the early 1980s. "They've got it (show biz bug) from both sides," says Richard, noting that their stepfather (Linda's current husband) is an agent for William Morris.

The proud mum Linda these days cheers on from the audience not only Kamila but also Teddy, who recently opened a series of gigs at the Royal Albert Hall and in Russia for Elton John, a far cry from the small clubs, such as Maxwell's in Hoboken, New Jersey, where he more often finds himself playing solo acoustic. Criminally, Teddy's four albums are largely unheard, the

D i s k s

- Richard Thompson** *Walking On A Wire* 1968
2009 Shout!Factory 826663-111087
- Teddy Thompson** *A Piece of What You Need*
Verve Forecast D0010930-02
- Kamila Thompson** *Love Lies* four-song CD
sampler 2Q 2010
- Linda Thompson** *Versatile Heart* Rounder
1161-3217-2
- Richard & Linda Thompson** *In Concert*
November 1975 Island (UK) IMCD 327 / 984
824-3



peaks being a break-up opus *Separate Ways* (his second) and his latest *A Piece of What You Need*, which is stylistically the most varied and best produced of his four long-players.

Teddy, who started performing with Richard on-stage while still in his teens, tells *TAV* that he doesn't think it was a conscious decision to choose his parents' profession, but agrees with his dad, that genetics might have something to do with it.

While he might not have his dad's guitar proficiency, he's proven to be a capable songwriter, and possesses a nicer voice, as demonstrated with his lead vocals on Richard's plaintive ballad "Persuasion," on the fourth disc of the new boxed set (also available on the elder Thompson's 2001, single-disc Capitol best-of, *Action Packed*).

Go to kamilathompson.com and you'll find a video of an attractive, early 30-ish blonde holding a guitar, explaining that it was almost a fore-gone conclusion that she'd go into "the family business."

Kamila, whose debut album *Love Lies* will be released early in 2010, has clearly taken notes on Teddy since the mid-1990s and his four albums, the latest being *A Piece of What You Need* (2008), his third for Verve.



"I think it's genetics more than anything," explains Richard as to why three of his kids are now musicians. The third child, Richard's 17-year-old son Jack from his second marriage, three years ago thought there were enough musicians in the family, and he planned to become a scientist. But two years ago Jack picked up the electric bass and now plays "22 hours a day. Jack's currently in six bands," whose style, according to Richard, is somewhere between "Shostakovich and death metal."

In contrast, Teddy and Kamila's songs wouldn't be out of place on *I Want See The Bright Lights Tonight*.

"I grew up listening to Buddy Holly, the Everly Brothers and Hank Williams, and liking it," says Teddy.

Like his half brother Jack, Teddy didn't take guitar lessons from his father. Explains Richard: "[Teddy] took lessons in school, which I think is a good idea. I couldn't teach him anything. He didn't want to hear it from his dad. That was fine with me." Richard never pushed any of his kids into music. "I've tried to pick up on their enthusiasm and interest and encourage them when I see it."

Kamila believes that it wasn't necessarily inevitable that she'd become a musician, but admits "the desire was there," and she had her first guitar lessons at 10 or 11.

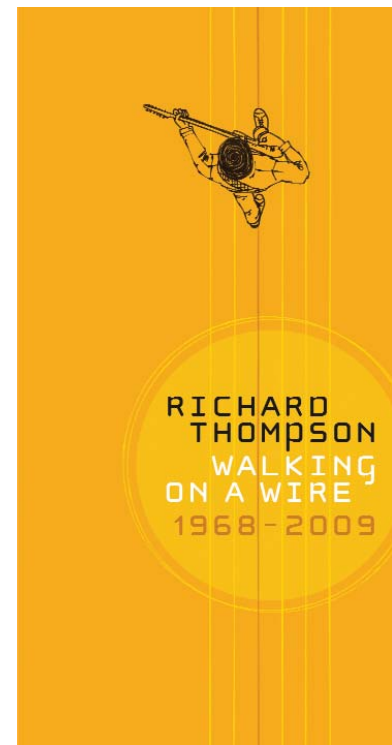
"The lure was pretty strong, but my mom hadn't worked as a musician for most of my childhood because she had a vocal condition. My brother went to LA to become a musician, so that was happening somewhere else. It wasn't as immediate as it might seem. It was sort of background hum."

Linda in 2002 overcome the affliction that prevented her from singing for 17 years, returning with the aptly titled album *Fashionably Late* and followed five years later with *Versatile Heart*, both on Rounder. The latter includes Kamila's composition "Nice Cars."

Linda tells *TAV* that her comeback was prompted by the death of her mother. "I wrote some songs. I did it for her in a way."

She'll soon start recording a new album, which will most likely be released independently in 2010. "It'll be slow as usual," Linda says, adding that while she finally comfortable in the studio, she "don't dare play live," due to stage fright.

On December 17, 2008, Richard, Linda, Teddy and Kamila all found themselves on stage at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall per-



forming two songs at a benefit concert. It was a far cry from 1982 when Linda (pregnant with Kamila) went out on the *Shoot Out The Lights* tour, even though she knew her marriage was over. Lore has it that she used to try to trip Richard between songs.

"It wasn't like the old days," Linda says of the impromptu reunion. There were a lot of people on stage (with the former spouses on opposite sides). I'm afraid it was very sedate," she sums up.