

Positive Feedback

Calm, cool and collected — Bidder pays \$2,650 for Mellow Candle

When it came to collecting rare folk psych recordings, Alan Marsh knew that his choices were somewhat limited in his hometown of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The 45-year-old collector had already compiled an impressive collection with what few resources he had locally, so he, like so many others, decided to try his luck with an on-line auction source.

"The potential for acquiring hard-to-find albums and CDs, which never show up here in Canada, is astounding," Marsh said.

In his pursuit of the genre, he kept his eye out for a little-known Dublin band called Mellow Candle and its one and only album, titled *Swaddling Songs*. The disc was originally released on the Decca offshoot label Deram in 1972 (SDL 7) and was commanding \$1,000 and more, if you were lucky enough to find a decent copy. For Marsh, acquiring the disc was the goal; it would surely be the centerpiece of his collection.

Recorded in December 1971, *Swaddling Songs* features the haunting female lead vocal duo of Clodagh Simonds and Alison O'Donnell, Frank Boyland on bass, William Murray on drums, and O'Donnell's husband, David Williams, on guitar. Although the disc received critical acclaim when it was released in April 1972, the buying public didn't echo the same appreciation for the group's pioneering take on traditional folk, often compared to Fairport Convention and early Yes. Mellow Candle broke up a year after the album's release. The band's sole studio album went on to achieve almost cult-like status among modern psych and progressive rock collectors searching for the roots of the genre (a collection of unreleased songs, *The Virgin Prophet*, was released on CD in 1996 (Kissing Spell/ Erewhon KSCD9520-F) and LP (Kissing Spell KSF00) in 1998. *Swaddling Songs* has also since been released on CD (on the U.K. See For Miles label 404, 1996, the Korean Si-Wan label, SRM0021 and on Polydor/Deram, POCD-1903 in Japan).

Patience would eventually pay off, in more ways than one, for Alan Marsh. In January 2005, he discovered the original release of the album on eBay. With nine days left on a 10-day auction and not willing to risk losing with a low bid, he quickly offered \$2,500 and waited out his fate. With so much time left on the record he began to wonder if his strategy to strike early



might be miscalculated. "Oddly enough, I didn't expect to win the album, [but] all the major bidding was done in the first 12 hours," he said. "I was fully expecting to be outbid at some point along the way." While one other bidder added some excitement to the early offers, Marsh upped the ante and secured the album for the remainder of the auction, with a final bid of \$2,650. "I'm very happy with my purchase," he said.

"Back in the 1990s, I was surprised to hear that the Mellow Candle album was becoming so collectible," said the band's former singer, Alison O'Donnell. "However, I have expected it to garner more attention, thus increasing its collectibility even further." Speaking to *Goldmine* from her home in Belgium, where she continues to record, she said although the record label made a memorable album, it failed to follow up with promotion on the record, thus making it very sought-after for progressive folk-rock collectors.

"I myself am very proud of what we achieved as Mellow Candle," she said. "Although it is a pity that we fell between the cracks due to the inability of others to follow through after *Swaddling Songs* was released. I think it was sadly overlooked during its time, but I guess, better late than never."

Have you found an elusive piece of your music collection on an online auction site? Send your story to positivefeedback@isleofwrite.com.

— Lisa Wheeler

(This album's star keeps rising. The same LP sold at auction in May 2004 for \$1,038. Less than one year later it goes for \$2,650! — Ed.)

Web site of interest
www.alisonodonnell.com