

## **Review from Richard Cox**

Music Journalist and Author

### **Reaching for the stars – and meeting them on stage**

Key Changes is a remarkable book. Few rock musician biographies mention the litany of 'might-have-beens' that make up a full life; Geoff Cook looks back at two careers that eventually collided – leading a talented, successful rock band to forming a band for construction giants Balfour Beatty, and the climb towards financial security in private industry.

Fifty years ago, when I was a reporter on a local newspaper, Geoff Cook was playing and writing music and was respected by so many of the big rock and jazz/rock names of the 60s and 70s, and music journalists. His band, Hardware, should have been multi-million-selling album makers; Geoff Cook, in my opinion, could have been a sort of Traveling Wilbury – top class musicians who simply loved playing.

This is a book for anyone with a creative bent. It would be so easy to say that Geoff's success was the result of a natural musical talent and a logical, mathematical mind. That would be wrong. He worked damned hard learning to play the piano and violin at an early age, only to be told by his parents to 'get a proper job'. Eventually he put the same devotion that made him a great musician into private industry, and this time found financial security, if not creative satisfaction.

In the mid-60s he played a gig at Dinnington Social Club. "with Little Richard whose band probably included a left-handed guitarist called Jimi Hendrix. Didn't really pay much attention."! The list of stars that Geoff, in various bands, played alongside includes Pink Floyd, Genesis, The Strawbs, The Move, Family, Fleetwood Mac, Barclay James Harvest and, in early guises, David Bowie, Keith Emerson, Ian Anderson as well as Del Shannon, Chuck Berry, Eric Clapton, John Mayall, Alan Price ... and many more. Respect is hard won in the world of music, and Geoff Cook was respected by so many.

Hardware was the nearest he got to achieving his potential global Rockstar status. The four-piece were exceptional. They weren't just Hardware in those days (the early 70s), they were 'Derby band Hardware' in newspaper jargon.

Perhaps what the book does miss out on is the fact that the author, and Hardware, were several levels above so many of the bands they supported musically. Geoff Cook was always the band leader, song writer and keyboards artist, but he relied on the skill and knowledge of Geoff Pearson, bass, Les Shaw, drums and Irvine Penchion, sax. It was pure teamwork.

After Hardware ("the music died") came Tony Jackson's Jazz and Blues Band, with Tony (Byron) Jackson adding a surreal touch through his poetry as well as vocals.

Key Changes is a brutally honest account of success, skill, damned hard work, talent, disappointment, redundancy and job loss, and eventual happiness through financial security, a wife and family. Geoff says that he's written the book so that his grandchildren will know him when he's gone. You've nailed it, Geoff.

The book is interspersed with newspaper cuttings from my friends and mentors. The Saturday Page crew, which included Alan Smith, Roy Hollingworth, Chris Ward, and me, and reporters, like Mark Graham, who wrote vividly, capturing the exceptional music in admiring words.

As a rock music fan, of course I'm disappointed that Geoff and Hardware didn't go on to sell-out stadium tours of America and Europe. As someone who knows Geoff Cook now, all I can say is: "Well done, and thanks for the fabulous memories."

*Richard Cox,*