

THE BIG DISH

BOUNCING OFF THE SATELLITES

Once hailed as one of British rock's most talented prospects, THE BIG DISH also had a talent for being overlooked. But their new LP, 'Satellites', aims to change all that...

STORY BY RICHARD COOK

"Welcome to winter," says Brian McFie with a grin.

There's snow dusting the streets, a light but bone-chilling wind gusting round Glasgow's stolid old buildings. McFie nurses a machine-made coffee and a chain of Marlboros. He plays guitar, and has done session work for more than one of the city's many aspiring bands. But all that is secondary to his principal role, as guitarist with The Big Dish, a job that suddenly counts for a lot.

After six years of trying, the group finally looks to be breaking through, with a single, 'Miss America', having nudged midway into the charts and their current LP, 'Satellites', ready to assert their importance. They are nearly there.

A friendly, ruddy-faced man with thick hair that just passes his collar, Brian blows out a lungful of smoke and taps a boot and waits for Steven to show up.

Steven Lindsay isn't too punctual. Today they're meant to be rehearsing an acoustic version of 'Prospect Street', one of the group's most enduring songs, but Steven is already two hours late.

In 1985, The Big Dish sounded like one of the most talented prospects in British rock. Lindsay's songs were beautifully crafted, literate creations, soaked in melody, captured with a fine balance of energy and refinement on their debut LP, 'Swimmer'. There was interest from America and their company, Virgin, had high hopes. But they couldn't get a hit.

Their second LP, 'Creeping Up On Jesus', sank almost without

months ticked by, and then a new deal with East West came up. Lindsay's manager persuaded him to go under his own name, the band broke up but, at the last moment, Steven decided to stick with the old name.

"This hadn't had its best shot yet, y'know? Things hadn't changed all that much."

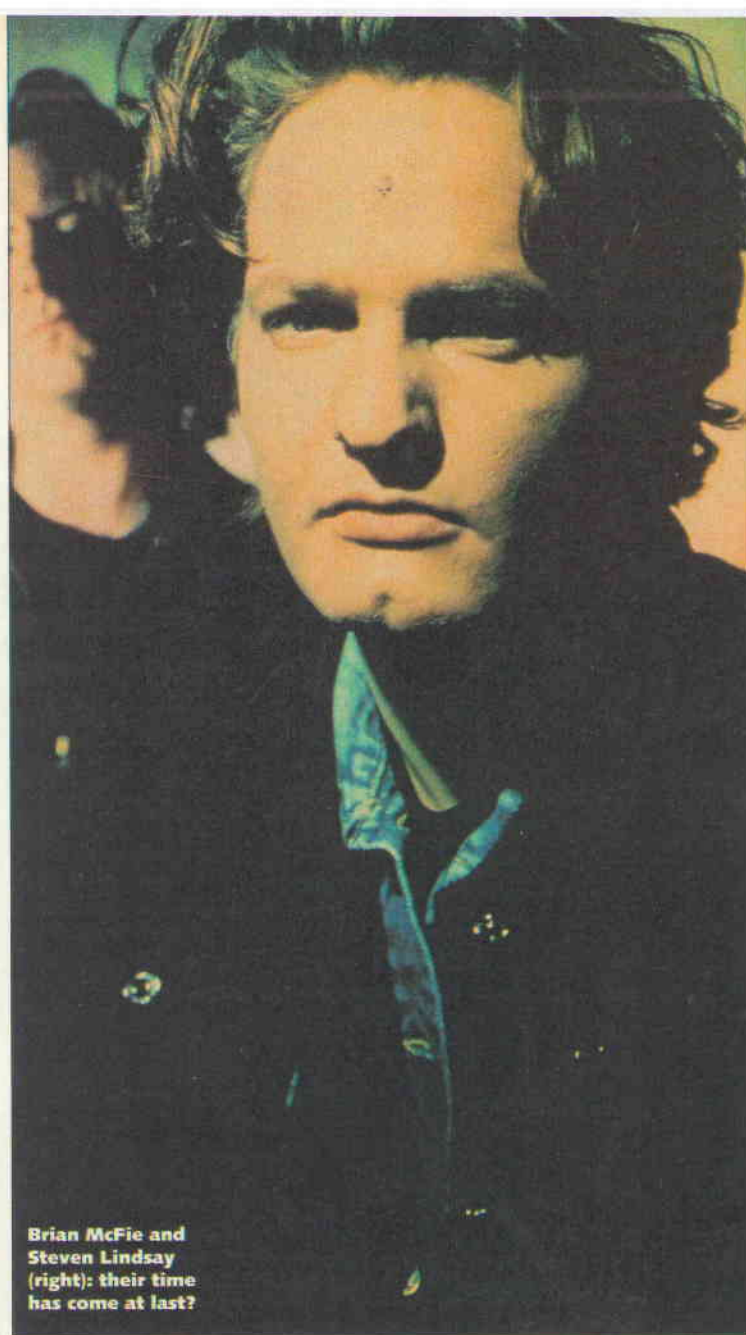
So, with McFie and keyboards player Craig Armstrong still on board, Lindsay recorded ten new songs for a third LP. Produced by Warne Livesey, 'Satellites' combines the zest and hopefulness of a first record with the sureness of a songwriter who senses his moment. Has Steven Lindsay's time finally come?

"I feel apprehensive," he says, huddled in a long black coat in their chilly rehearsal rooms. "I'll believe it when I see it. You can't make people buy records. That's one of the exciting things about it - you don't know what'll happen next."

There may not be many songwriters as gifted as Lindsay in the community; Paddy McAloon or Ian McNabb, perhaps, but even they don't quite catch the fluency and detail of The Big Dish's songbook.

It's dangerous to speak of pop tunesmiths having vision, yet Lindsay's best songs seem vivid and palpable in a rare kind of way. His third-person songs, including 'Miss America' and 'Warning Sign' on the current record, are convincingly drawn, lines shaded in rather than written, while the melancholy of his ballads has a restraint that is hauntingly effective.

Now on a long UK tour, they've



Brian McFie and Steven Lindsay (right): their time has come at last?

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BRIAN MCFIE

Lindsay looked and sounded intense but awkward, his fine high voice strung on wires over a merely competent band. The new line-up - including classically-trained bassist Tracey Gilbert, Colin Berwick on keyboards and Skip Reid on drums - delivers with the panache the songs deserve.

"Performing certainly isn't one of my strengths," Lindsay admits. "It's a confidence thing. Some nights I crumble. Sometimes you get fed up and want to be loved a bit more, have more people appreciating the records, and it translates to the gigs and I sound pissed off."

"But success does change you in that you become more confident,

"I've got a lot to learn on that." Another Scottish band looking for a break? Lindsay doesn't quite see it like that. Though he now lives in Glasgow, he's from Airdrie; McFie still resides in Coatbridge. The Glasgow 'scene' doesn't interest him, and he's dubious about the merits of a Scottish rock.

"We're fated to be thought of as a Scottish band, whether we want to be or not. The country's so small that you can't get away from it. But I don't think there's been a Scottish sound since Postcard (the seminal '70s indie label)."

'Satellites' insists that people should be listening to him; perhaps this time, they will.

"Aye, well, you get away with i