



## Louis Philippe & The Night Mail The Road To The Sea

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LP / CD / digital



**Louis Philippe and The Night Mail return with a new captivating record where the songs are once again faultless. Carrying on the journey away from the classic towards the unexpected with new synths and hand claps adding a sense of the abrupt and, with voices calling from the wings, a sense of play and a lack of fear.**

Beyond the regular tales routinely retold, there's a secret, parallel narrative of pop history. One written by the true enthusiasts and eclectics, in which a perennial favourite like Pet Sounds didn't just inspire endless claims of exceptionality but a long trail of harmonic riches leading all the way to the 21st century. In this alternative universe Philippe Auclair aka Louis Philippe, Anglo-French singer-songwriter extraordinaire, has been an admired fixture for the past four decades, from his beginnings as protagonist and house producer at Mike Alway's fabled él Records label through his forays into the Shibuya sound and collaborations with the likes of Bertrand Burgalat, XTC's Dave Gregory, High Llamas' Sean O'Hagan and Young Marble Giants' Stuart Moxham right up to his more recent adventures with The Night Mail.

Who they, you say? A loose ensemble around bassist/sometime Acid Jazz artist/encyclopedian of sound Andy Lewis, ex-Death in Vegas guitarist/head of heads at Papernut Cambridge/legacy indie's favourite live and session drummer Ian Button and guitarist/Viennese pop ambassador to Canterbury Robert Rotifer, The Night Mail came together a decade ago to make an album with underrated post-glam genius John Howard. Following that one-off project they spent a couple of evenings in London playing backing band for Robert Forster and Louis Philippe, in the process forming an alliance with the latter that would bring about their first collaborative album Thunderclouds in 2020. Faced with the complexities of realising the rich sound of that record onstage, Philippe brought on board his long-time associate, musical monster brain and multi-instrumentalist Danny Manners.

So when Louis Philippe & The Night Mail met again at Rimshot Studio in rural Kent in the spring of 2023 to tackle album number two, the same extended line-up was assembled. Prior to these sessions, Philippe and Lewis had got together to meticulously prepare arrangements for this new batch of songs, already setting out a distinctly different stylistic direction. If Thunderclouds had captured the sound of the band live in the studio, work on The Road to the Sea began with just four days' intense recording under Rimshot's oakwood eaves followed by extensive extra sessions in Andy Lewis' hideaway studio somewhere up in deepest Bassetlaw.

As the core duo of obsessives, Lewis/Philippe immersed themselves in the material, adding voices, instruments and effects, interrupted only once by Robert Rotifer visiting to throw in a few more touches of Telecaster. Their mission was to fully realise the sonic and harmonic potential of songs as varied as the partly portentous, partly (deceptively) jaunty opener "The Road to Somewhere", the catchy, XTC-flavoured "Pictures of Anna", the breezy-yet-apocalyptic space age groove of "Where Did We Go Wrong" or the piano-led Francophone waltz of "Une maison sans toit". And by this point we've only made it halfway into side one.

As is Auclair/Philippe's incurable wont, there is plenty of doom lurking underneath the music box sweetness of "Wine and Roses" or the cinematic elegance of the almost-instrumental "Always" with fuzz and Morse code interferences roughing up the sheen of its one word chorus and its liquid coda gliding off into a Gainsbourgian sunset. A very different, much more venomous kind of rayon vert is shining through in the vengeful "Watching Your Sun Go Down", featuring maybe the most rock chorus Louis Philippe has ever written, in stark contrast to the gentlest of possible tributes that is "Song for Paddy (Wings of Desire)".

At its heart, though, this is the work of a seasoned songwriter with lots of life to look back on, be it the hazy innocence of “notre première fois” in the wistful “Le baiser” or a grown man's wine-addled walk home in the lonely hours of night (“A Friend”). The maritime theme of the album title is both metaphorical (the love-torn “All at Sea”) and sincerely literal. We find our hero reminiscing over youthful days spent on the coast of Normandy, from the sun-soaked memory land of “Those Days of Summer” awakening “ghosts of seasons past”, via the undulating gentleness of a long drive “To The Sea” and all the way back to Paris in the starkly ambient “Ville lumière”. There is a sense of a circle closing, a sense of the glittering lights of the sparkling capital reflected in a nocturnal Canal Saint-Martin mirroring those of a Normandy seaside town in the English Channel.

It all adds up to a colourful mix of delicate textures, subtly sculpted reverb, melodic mellotron madness, Wilsonesque layered vocal harmonies, and the sort of long lost, very English whimsy it would take an anglophile Frenchman to evoke. And yet, in its transparent spaciousness dotted with charming detail, The Road To The Sea also brings to mind the sound of Summer Dancing, Andy Lewis' acclaimed 2017 collaboration with the late, great Judy Dyble. Not without reason, he is taking the production credit on this album that is a sort of continuation, but by no means a repetition of its predecessor Thunderclouds.

In many ways The Road to the Sea is the playfully psychedelic album that Louis Philippe always had in him, but never got round to making. He has now.

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### Tracklisting

**A1** The Road To Somewhere  
**A2** Pictures Of Anna  
**A3** Where Did We Go Wrong  
**A4** La Maison Sans Toit  
**A5** Those Days Of Summer  
**A6** All At Sea  
**A7** Le Baiser

**B1** Wine And Roses  
**B2** Watching Your Sun Go Down  
**B3** A Friend  
**B4** Song For Paddy (Wings Of Desire)  
**B5** To The Sea  
**B6** Always  
**B7** Ville lumière

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