

*We invite you on a journey from Planet Gong to Earth, leaving behind the already quite distant world inhabited by Pot Head Pixies, Flying Teapots and Octave Doctors, where the only station worth listening to Radio Gnome. It's also worth leaving your prejudices at the door.*

**Justi Szadkowska (KVLT) – interview with: Kavus Torabi, Dave Sturt and Fabio Goltfetti:**

*Attempting to compare GONG to other bands in a similar formation period is an impossible task. It cannot be pigeonholed or compared to anything else. It is a phenomenon on a global scale, perhaps even on the scale of a universe. No other group has been so focused on its deconstruction and pursuing new styles along different paths. They pursued this path to the extent that when the name GONG turned out to be too narrow, certain groups of mothers, daughters, sons, cousins and even mothers-in-law were formed. Said groups drifted only on a faint streak of personal connections with the mother GONG.*

*Isn't this the style of the project? A collection of inspirations coming from musicians who, over the years, unknowingly boarded a ship called GONG, and stayed longer or shorter during the intergalactic journey to the Earth? Even a brief history of the band/brand/symbol GONG and its branches could become an excuse for making a sci-fi series, but this time it's not about their history.*

*Analyzing the history and discography, I concluded that the reunion in 2009 (the reunion of Steve Hillage and Daevid Allen), which resulted in the album **2032**, became like a new path. Path that you are following as a band in the current line-up. Leaving behind the already quite distant world inhabited by Pot Head Pixies, Flying Teapots and Octave Doctors, where the only station worth listening to was Radio Gnome. It's incredible, but Daevid clearly saw it coming...*

*"This album ends the story," he said in an interview before the release of **2032**. "Of course, I can't reveal what will happen, but everything ends well and I hope people find it interesting.". It gives me the creeps, but isn't this some kind of prophecy coming true these days?*

**KAVUS:** Well, Daevid said to me that he didn't want the band to end just because he would die. I had no idea it would end up with me replacing him! He said he saw me in a dream! I do know that from the moment we met each other we connected pretty deeply. I suppose standing back, it's all unsurprising. Who knows? This is certainly the longest I've ever been in one band, particularly with such a stable line up. I feel like we're only just getting started!

*The album **2032** - which was the point of the meeting of the pillars of the group - Hillage and Allen after years. It also became a kind of excuse to finally unravel the complicated, unknown life from another universe. A concept album that describes how the invisible Planet Gong will finally make contact with Earth in the year 2032.*

*8 years left to finally reach Earth. It's quite soon! Is this the right course? Is this the course you are currently following?*

**KAVUS:** It had better be! We're too far into this to alter the course now!

*As a fan, it's a dream come true to join your favourite band.*

*Did any of you ever think that you'd be playing, heck, even creating Gong, that it was even possible? Although if over fifty years of existence of the "space rock" band has taught us anything, it's to always expect the unexpected...*

*How exactly did that happen? What was your path to the band?*

**KAVUS:** I had already joined my favourite band when I joined Cardiacs in 2003, so I had previous experience of this and I don't know if this was ever my dream, necessarily. I was always more concerned with my own music rather than someone else's. That said, Gong feels like the band I was born to play in. The music and philosophy of Gong had been an influence on me since I was a teenager. I loved the idea of being in a band with Daevid because he was a very inspiring person and I especially liked the idea of collaborating with him on writing. When he told us his plans for us to continue the band without him, we were all somewhat sceptical but it really came down to two choices; to do it or not to do it. Once we all agreed to do it we had to move the thing forward confidently and with passion and commitment. I think if we had attempted to try and recreate Gong of old (which Gong to pick? There are so many versions!) We would have failed because every Gong has been unique and followed it's own path. It was our responsibility to follow our path while remaining true to the core philosophy of the Planet Gong.

**DAVE:** I had worked with Daevid Allen previously on a Cipher album with Theo Travis, so I already a connection.

I was invited to audition for the band in early 2009, when Mike Howlett was leaving for Australia. I was asked to learn a few of the classic Gong tracks and also a couple of Steve Hillage Band tracks, since SHB were the support on the upcoming European tour. I had heard them as a teenager but was surprised how complicated to play they were ..

It changed my life ..

**FABIO:** I heard about Gong in 1975 after being a fan of Soft Machine, I discovered that the founder of Soft Machine left before their first album and formed Gong in France. Living in Brazil we were very limited to have access to imported records at that time, but the boss of my father in France was a Gong fan, and he brought me Angel's Egg, and later my father got Camembert Electrique from Lido musique in Paris. In the late 70's I was part of the GAS mailing list and I received many correspondences about Daevid and Gong related artists. Then one day a friend of mine May East was in the UK releasing an album through the same label as Daevid, so she put me in touch with him directly and from there we met personally in Brazil in 1992 and shared a gig. We became friends and stayed in touch over the years until he invited me to play in the Glissando Orchestra at the Gong Unconvention in Amsterdam in 2006. After this we did a few gigs under the name Gong Global Family and this led me to be invited to join Gong around late 2011.

*Bands' history should basically give a free pass to some of the offensive comments that there is no one from the basic band members at the moment. That this is not the real GONG. However, GONG is only a ship of sorts that the musicians board, bring their luggage, and get off if they get bored with the journey. Or, if they want to change the direction of the journey altogether. GONG wanders on without them. The most interesting thing about this phenomenon is that the ship keeps sailing, even*

*though many different people have taken the wheel. Does anyone making key decisions and receiving e-mails - automatically become a leader? Maybe the one who writes the lyrics?*

*So, who is now the captain of the Starfleet and steers the USS GONG ?*

**KAVUS:** Gong is now, as it has always been, a self-run collective. Between the five of us, each member brings to the collective their strengths. Some of the guys are better at admin, organisation and the financial side of things, others more the artistic direction and music. We all work together. Depending on what the task is, each one of us wears the Captain hat for a while.

**DAVE:** We are a very democratic band .. all major decisions are decided jointly .. Clearly Kavus is the focal point but we all share in the creative process .. we compose communally, all together in the rehearsal room.

**FABIO:** The main brain was Daevid Allen, and he had the ability to connect musicians in a way that they could do their best, I compare to what some jazz bands are, following the legacy of the mentor.

What happened is that Daevid put this band together and couldn't continue due to his illness, so we started being a collective composer. Instead of trying to find a singer, front man, which would be wrong as there's no replacement and comparison to Daevid, Kavus took the vocals and it was the right decision. We continue as a democratic band, we all compose together, and each of us could reveal his skills.

*Let's go back for a moment to the first album on which you appear alongside Allen, namely*

**I See You** - *I have the impression that this is an album on which Daevid gives his new colleagues a bit more space than usual. There is some other space in this album, other perspectives, and more new solutions here.*

*You were the co-creators of the songs? Was Daevid the censor of every note, or there was freedom in decision-making? What did the work on the album look like?*

**KAVUS:** Daevid was not at all dictatorial with that album, the band had already started making it when I joined. I just added all the ideas and tunes I thought were appropriate. As far as I can remember all of them were used.

**DAVE:** Daevid always liked to work off other people's ideas .. he asked us for musical ideas .. some were just riffs, others were almost complete tracks .. and some were based on drums and bass improvisations in a recording studio in Sao Paulo.

The tracks were then developed remotely, with Daevid and Orlando in Australia, Fabio in Brasil and Ian, Kavus and I in the UK. It wasn't an easy process, especially since Daevid was being treated for cancer.

There will be a remixed and re-imagined version of this album released early next year .. it being the 10th anniversary of its release.

**FABIO:** This album started in a studio session in Brazil after a tour in 2013. Daevid was opened to contributions of each new member. Apart from the lyrics that he wrote, we recorded what we think would be good for each track, we were in 3 continents at that time, and it was mixed / produced together with his son Orlando in Australia. For me this album is

very important as it was my first contribution as a Gong member and Daevid & Gilli's last recordings. Also it was the seed of this new band. A remix version is being finalized to be released as the 10th Anniversary Special Edition.

***Rejoice! I'm Dead!*** - this is an album in your current line-up, but still with unmistakable Allen's voice. You get the impression while listening that the GONG-ship is still moving on the so-called autopilot after Daevid left. With many themes of referring to the style of Daevid and Steve, it's a kind of homage. And this clever title – truly Monty Python style!

To what extent was it "YOURS" and to what extent is it still music left by Daevid? At concerts, "Rejoice" and "Kapital" work great, so how do you perceive the material from this album in retrospect?

**KAVUS:** I don't necessarily feel ownership of any music I write, it just sort of appears. Regarding Rejoice! We took the words 'Rejoice! I'm dead, At last I'm free' from a poem of Daevid's but the rest of the words were mine. Daevid was very much at the forefront of our thoughts while we made the album. I wanted to make a positive death album, largely because of Daevid's own attitude towards death, both his and death in general and also because I had already made a very death-heavy album, Bottled Out Of Eden, with my band Knifeworld which was much more personal. I wanted Rejoice! To be more universal. A celebration of death, if you like.

**DAVE:** The vast majority of the album is new material. Daevid left us with half of Kapital and his improvised vocal over a track of mine, 'Beatrix'. A lot of the rest of the album is clearly a reflection on Daevid's passing ... and the title comes from a poem of his called All I Ask ..

They are guest appearances also from Steve Hillage and Didier Malherbe .. but as far the creative process goes we felt no compulsion to try to recreate the Gong of old .. we revelled in the opportunity to take the ship in a new direction.

**FABIO:** This is a kind of transition album, an homage to Daevid, but also the opportunity to put a direction to the band. There are mentions of Daevid, but most of the material was new, apart from the first half of Kapital, and his voice that appears in the album. But basically this album was a collection of individual tracks collectively developed by this new band.

***The Universe Also Collapses*** - CD from 2019, an album in which, in my opinion, you finally settled comfortably in a spaceship called GONG with a new banner tailored to the already established members. The album contains only 4 songs with the over 20-minute "Forever Reoccurring" at the forefront. This piece quiveringly introduces us to a state of bliss and the mantra-like repeating vocals interwoven with cosmic-sounding ambient loops, angular riffs and unobvious percussive bites. The momentum and arrangement complexity are associated with „Close To The Edge” by Yes. Incredible drums and bass and guitar passages - I wish I could hear it at a live concert!

What was the most important thing on this album? Was it the moment to identify with the band and the name GONG, as in "yes, that's us"?

**KAVUS:** Yeah, pretty much. I think this is the album we really found the sound of the current Gong. Good news! We will hopefully be playing Forever Reoccurring in Poland, if we can. I love performing it! 😊 I think there was a real change in Gong, post-pandemic. For me at

least, the importance of the band, our quest and our journey seemed to become much clearer. I think before 2020 we tried to balance old Gong material with new stuff but after we came back we realised that concentrating on recent music was much more effective and necessary. This music was written for now and, because we wrote it, we understand the motivations and thinking behind every part and song intrinsically which makes for a much more powerful and sincere experience.

**DAVE:** You can hear a live version of Forever Reoccurring on the album Pulsing Signals, .. we do occasionally still play it when we have the opportunity to play a longer set.

By this time I had been in Gong for 10 years and all of us (apart from Cheb) had played in the band with Daevid, so there was never a time when we felt that we were anything other than Gong. We had been pleased with the response to Rejoice! I'm Dead but we knew that this album would have no guests. We had forged a strong alliance between us through a lot of touring .. which is reflected in the strong focus and direction of 'Universe'.

**FABIO:** I think The Universe Also Collapses it's our "first" album, it has the model and concept that we have followed since then. It's music composed collectively and played under influence of Gong spirit guided mostly by intuition, we found our creative process of this Gong incarnation and this album has all elements that extends to the cover and our live performances.

*And finally, your latest work:*

**Unending Ascending** - a work devoid of burdens and insecurities. Completely free from looking back, on the so-called full breath. You can feel the joy of following the GONG banner on your terms.

*Many musicians today admit that the pandemic period was a kind of catharsis and brought a lot of positive qualities to their work. A time of total depression, but also in many cases reaching the inside of oneself to face the demons that were hidden in everyday life and were slowly eating us from the inside. Pretending ended, we had to fight and realize what was important. The album is incredibly fresh and spacious, even pop.*

*Is this work also the result of getting rid of some burden? What happened before you met again in the studio after the pandemic?*

**DAVE:** The first gig we played after the pandemic was at a small psyche festival called Kozfest .. and it was fabulous. Something happened while we were all isolating, wondering if we would ever play again. .. that anxiety brought everything into focus and we all felt it. We were suddenly on another level of tightness and freedom .. it was extra-ordinary.

We road tested several of the tracks that ended up on UA .. so we knew how good the album was going to be.

**FABIO:** When we started this album we already had an idea how it should be and in some ways it became part of our trilogy that started with The Universe Also Collapses. The songs appeared very spontaneously at the rehearsals, and it is an album with a diversity of ideas, short songs compared to the previous album and each song has its own world, it's like an album of singles.

*The five of you are great at concerts, it is clear that this collective is a well-functioning long-distance concert machine. I must honestly admit that you were an absolute mystery to me during your performance at the Summer Fog Festival in Katowice last year. I didn't know what to expect and I simply didn't expect anything. What happened there is completely unexplainable. Performing alongside Steve Hillage and especially when you played the flagship anthem – „Master Builder” was something that no drug could provide me in my current existence. The music spread over my body and flowed down my spine in a thick stream, relaxed my temples, freed my tear ducts and muscles went limp, leading my body into pulsating dances. This happened with most of the audience. At the end, we threw ourselves into each other's arms and hugged everyone who was nearby - an unforgettable psychedelic experience.*

*For you, it was also your first experience playing in Poland. What were your impressions of meeting a Polish audience?*

**KAVUS:** I found it rather overwhelming. We performed a set made up exclusively of our last three albums and the response was phenomenal. I can't wait for us to return. I love playing every ad anywhere but I think the Polish gigs are the one's I'm most excited about.

**DAVE:** That was a great festival for us .. playing as Gong on the first day and then backing Steve in The Steve Hillage Band on the second day. We really enjoy playing to a festival audience that don't know us, because we know how incendiary our live performance is .. and the response from the Katowice crowd was fantastic. We really loved playing in Poland for the first time and we are really looking forward to our concerts there in November this year.

**FABIO:** As a former architect, as soon as I arrived at the venue, a futuristic building, I had a great feeling about the festival. Also we played with one of our mentors, Steve Hillage and had the honor to be on the same bill with Nick Mason. Pink Floyd is still a big influence on me. I really enjoyed the vibe and hospitality of the Polish audience, we love to play in places that we have never been before.

*On the album **Unending Ascending** appears a feminine element – Saskia Maxwell (currently in the Ozric Tentacles members). Her vocals combined the old world of GONG with the modern incarnation. Saskia also appeared on stage during the joint tour with Ozric Tentacles in the UK. I saw 2 of your concerts in London and Edinburgh. Saskia performed a kind of dervish dance on stage during “Master Builder” – a perfect element to complement the trance!*

*Where did the idea of her participation on the album and then on stage come from? How did you get along with **Ozric**, because this was not your first joint tour?*

**KAVUS:** We get on with those guys very well, they're kindred spirits, really. Saskia is great fun and has such a wonderful energy. Including her in the Gig shows brought a wonderful feminine aspect that had perhaps been missing since Gilli's passing. I hope we can do more together.

**FABIO:** As we were touring with Ozric Tentacles, this combination happened spontaneously during some gigs, and as she sang one the the tracks that we were developing, then we extended her guest appearance to the album.

*Whenever I think about music and its extraordinary legacy in the case of milestones such as GONG, I ask whether the musicians in the band are firmly connected to reality or are rather mystics with a mission to lift people's spirits. This has become more important than ever after the pandemic. Humour and grotesque in a way carved a path to mysticism.*

*Gong is mystical in its way. Are concerts a kind of mystery, an attempt to connect with a higher power?*

**DAVE:** Ha! I can never be accused of being connected to reality! I am the eternal space cadet. Whenever I play I lose myself in the music .. and playing with Gong is absolutely the best place to fly through realms of beauty and mystery. Every concert is a joy to me.

**FABIO:** As Daevid Allen said in many forms, "it's too serious to be serious", or "Hari Hari supermarket", so talking about spirituality it's always a complicated task, especially in this world that we live in today that is very polarized in many areas. So I think it's just music, to make people happy and reflective, in a certain way bring consciousness to everyone to be a better being.

*Each of you also has other musical activities. You don't boredom, so it's hard to believe that you have time to rest. Or maybe it's rest - working on a different kind of music that gives you relief and inspires you to work on other threads.*

*„This Celestial Engine“ is an exciting new project combining the talents of three extraordinary musicians with diverse musical backgrounds. Aside from you - Dave, also drummer - Ted Parsons (Swans, Prong, Godflesh, Killing Joke, Jesu), and keyboardist - Roy Powell (InterStatic, Anthony Braxton, Mumpbeak with Bill Laswell).*

*This unique blend of experimental improvisation, and ambient avant-jazz rock, brings to mind another supergroup moving in jazz climates - TRIFECTA, a collaboration of BEGGS/HOLZMAN/BLUBDELL. Beggs, with his untamed and specific sense of humour, introduced an element of the grotesque and caused the jazz label to not fit there, despite bass and Chapman Stick playing - he is also a vocalist.*

*Dave, you play bass, Ebow Bass on the mentioned album, and you also use some unspecified Weird Shit – what are these things? Tell me, are you musically closer to jazz or so-called progressive music? Do you know Nick Beggs personally?*

**DAVE:** Yes, we just finished a short tour here in the UK, which was truly fantastic. Our music is 95% improvised .. which is both terrifying and thrilling .. we never rehearse, , we just start playing and responding to each other and somehow a beautifully formed track emerges (usually!) .

We formed a few years ago in Norway and this was the first time that we have done a series of gigs. Our eponymous album was realeased earlier this year on Discus music and it is getting a great response.

Yes, I have met Nick several times, he is a lovely guy .. and more than a little crazy. I also shared a meal with Adam Holzman once, when he and Theo Travis were playing with Steven Wilson in London .. I've never considered that there is a similarity with us and Trifecta .. but I guess Roy Powell and Adam do have a similar approach.

I'm one of very few people playing fretless bass with an Ebow (electronic bow .. look it up) .. I love the strangeness off the sounds it produces. I also create weird loops and soundscapes from things I record ... or shortwave radio.

As for genre .. I genuinely don't think in those terms.. it's all just music to me .. I play whatever feels right at the time.

<https://discusmusic.bandcamp.com/album/this-celestial-engine-166cd-2024>

*Fabio, you graduated from Architecture and Urbanism College at the University of São Paulo – are you an Architect/Engineer by profession? When did you realise that you were closer to music than working in a construction safety helmet? What was the deciding factor? I found out that already during your studies you were fascinated by the ideological surroundings of the GONG trilogy as a planet and the characters living there to such an extent that you created an urban vision of this place, settlement – tell us something about it.*

**FABIO:** This is a long story and journey...

I love architecture to help build a better place to live in this world, but I've been a musician before being an architect, since I was 14-15. I worked as an architect in parallel with my music career for a few years. In university I met friends also interested in music, and of course our first proper band was formed there. Also I consider music as a kind of architecture of space and time, so there's more connections. Of course being a Gong fan, when I knew about the trilogy, Planet Gong, this automatically triggered a lot of reading, like Asterix, The Hobbit, small communities living in an ideal reality. I had an opportunity to design with colleagues an imaginary village based on many aspects of Daevid's planet gong. In the 60's there were many alternative ideas associated with the counterculture that became part of the environmental consciousness in the 90's.

I have a solid music career with a psychedelic band in Brazil called Violeta de Outono since the mid 80's and a couple of solo albums, some under the umbrella of The Invisible Opera Company of Tibet, a name of Daevid Allen.

*Kavus, you seem to be the busiest person in the band – considering the number of duties and groups you are involved in. This year you released your second solo album „The Banishing“ and you have just finished a promotional tour in the UK. You also performed a specially composed work called „Lion of The Lord's Elect“ (in a six-person including two drums) at the Roadburn Festival in Tilburg and you toured with Miranda Sex Garden. I should also mention the amazing trio The Utopia Strong /Steve Davis, Kavus Torabi and Michael J. York/ – and these are just a few of your activities... This is material for another long interview.*

*Contrarily, I will ask about something else. I have noticed that you constantly wear a very characteristic pendant with the image of Faravahar, a symbol of Zoroastrianism. Does it have anything to do with your ethnicity or does it play an important role in the music you create?*

**KAVUS:** Well spotted. It plays no real role in my music, more that my family all have Persian names and consider ourselves Persian. By and large, having lived in England most of my life, I am for all intents and purposes an English guy but I wear it to connect myself with my Persian roots and to separate myself from the Islamic Republic which holds a grip over Iran currently.

*We're getting to the end...*

**Kscope** - your current label recently announced that a 2024 tour live album will be released in the autumn, specifically a performance recorded in Edinburgh, which I had the pleasure of attending and meeting you! I hope it will be available for purchase at concerts in Poland.

*Was it a planned undertaking or did you decide that this particular concert was the best and should be released? I can't compare which of the performances I was at was better - I was a photographer and many details simply eluded me. Tell me more about this.*

**KAVUS:** The label suggested releasing an expanded version of the album to promote the forthcoming tours. We didn't record every show but, as far as I remember, Edinburgh was the best sounding of the few that we did. My voice was a little ragged because it was the last date of the tour, but I think it has a good vibe. The energy of the songs is, I think, pretty exciting

**DAVE:** Lots of gigs on the tour were really great, it just so happened that the Edinburgh show had the best quality recording. Yes, it will be available in Poland on the tour.

**FABIO:** Edinburgh was the last concert of the tour and very vibey, but also it was the best recorded.

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### ***prologue***

*In November, GONG will hit the road again in Europe, including 4 shows in Poland – just after a long visit to the USA (in October) for the first time in its current incarnation.*

*Some may be disappointed because Kavus does not treat the audience with "acid" tea. GONG does treat with music instead - enhanced by a series of hypnotic visual effects, is a source of perplexion for those who decide to be part of this ritual. You have to take my word for it – the tour in November will be stunning. Daevid Allen has unfortunately passed away, but this version of GONG is more than just a tribute or, as killjoys try to discredit and dub pastiche. This version of GONG has created an incredible universe of sounds, which is as classic as anything the original band has come up with.*

*I'm boarding this ship.*

**Justi Szadkowska**