the fat lady singles

(& opera obscura)
Line-up changes followed. First, Dubliner Dermot Lynch joined, graduating from backline technician to bass player. Then, in 1987, Tim Bradshaw was introduced to Nick at London’s Marquee club. It was a key moment. Classically trained, Tim’s contributions on guitar and piano were essential, but it was his versatility with a wide range of other instruments that would give TFLS a huge edge. The line-up that would storm Dublin’s National Stadium was complete.

A second single *Be Still* was released in March 1988 on Harbour Sounds records and a third in 1989, the now classic *Arclight*, was issued on the band’s own Fourth Base record label. By this stage both public and critical interest were greatly increasing. A fourth single *Dronning Maud Land*, released in January 1990, brought the simmering pot nicely to the boil.

The sell-out shows in Dublin and London were the clinchers and in 1990 the band signed to East West Records in London and Atlantic in America. Nick, whose songwriting powers were now much admired, was rewarded with a publishing contract with Island Music. The man who had once sung nervously in a New York bar, was suddenly given the free rein (and the record company tour support) to sing nervously in venues the world over.

Tours of Germany with Diesel Park West, of Canada with Spirit of the West and of the UK with Hot House Flowers quickly followed and with them some ‘on the road’ TFLS
more bands in Ireland than U2. A presenter cut me short to chip in cheerfully "Yes, of course, there's TFLS as well, they're brilliant, play in a club up the road all the time."

My sense of discomfort was further heightened by another presenter who waded in with further ringing endorsements of the band and an astonished "I can't believe they're Irish." The words left unspoken but deafeningly apparent in the room that day was that TFLS were too good to be Irish. We made our excuses and left. In the months that followed graffiti as to TFLS's excellence adorned every dressing room we encountered.

TFLS's major label debut, the single *Man Scared*, was released in October 1990. It was followed in May 1991 by the album *Twist* which spawned three more singles: a re-release of *Arclight* (April 1991), *Twist* (May 1991) and *Deborah* (August 1991). All were greeted enthusiastically by press and public alike. The album release was followed by a year of worldwide touring. *Twist* performed well in the British and Irish charts and also provided the band with their first ever American success when *Man Scared* entered the US alternative chart.

TFLS gigs at this point were heady affairs. Checking them out reluctantly at the time (rivals and all that) I was struck by the sheer warmth of affection both on and off the stage. This was a band that loved playing and greatly appreciated the audience's part in making the gigs special and memorable. Nick later likened their live show to a 'Mobile Saturday Night'.

Musically the band was quite different to the norm at the time. This was an era when the 'Madchester' scene held sway and those bands that didn't like a 'Loose Fit' were generally a reasonably heavy variety

It was at this point that TFLS first appeared on my own modest music industry radar. My own band, Something Happens, had also just signed a record deal and was starting to tour the UK. During one radio interview somewhere in the UK midlands, I found myself arguing defensively that there were
Touch and, most notably, Drunkard Logic, which gave the band their highest ever UK chart placing. The release was followed by a punishing six months of touring that culminated with a storming pre-Christmas show in New York’s punk mecca CBGB’s.

Then in January 1994 it was announced to a disbelieving fanbase that Nick Kelly had split the band. It appeared to be a strange and even shocking decision. TFLS had seemed to have everything - great songs, a great live act, and they’d accomplished the transition from their earliest 4-track outings to the polished sound of Johnson with aplomb. Their singles were getting ever closer to that elusive international breakthrough hit and they were committed to exhaustive heavy touring.

It turned out that this last activity was their undoing. Gigs may be great to play, but touring is an arduous and sometimes soul-destroying affair. Nick had become painfully aware of all that it was taking him away from the lives of friends and family unfolding without him. “There comes a time” he remarked later “when the realisation hits you that your friends are falling out of love with each other, falling in love with other people, having children, losing loved ones and you’re never there when it happens.”

Happily the following years were kind to TFLS members. In 1995 Tim Bradshaw and Dermot Lynch reached the US Top 10 playing with American band Dog’s Eye View. Dermot subsequently enjoyed success as a session bass player, then went on to become one of the UK’s most sought-after tour managers. Tim continued to bring his multi-instrumental and production talents to numerous artists, most significantly David Gray.

And, after an 18-month break, Nick Kelly began to write and record again. His first solo album Between Trapezes was released to ecstatic reviews in 1997, and he was voted ‘Best Irish Male Singer’ at the 1999 Irish Music Awards, with Van Morrison and Christy Moore trailing in his wake.
His second solo album, *Running Dog*, released in January 2005, again firmly underlined his reputation as one of Ireland’s best songwriters.

But listening to these songs now, even at this distance in time, or perhaps more so because of it, it’s easy to see how heart breaking the decision to split the band must have been. Nothing ever really occupies as special a place in your heart as your first love and for The Fat Lady Sings the songs on this album are very much the fruits of that first love.

Sleeve notes tend to present cold, hard facts but the songs are never either. They are the band’s warm beating heart. The singles here run chronologically and hence capture first footsteps, early hopes and the band’s gradual progression to more pristine sound and professional recording. More importantly though they capture that wonderful process of Nick Kelly trying to make sense of himself, the world and his place in it. It was a wide-eyed questioning that was intoxicating to watch and hear. With Nick you always felt it could be you up there, you struggling to approach that girl, you trying to “shine like an Arclight”. Listen and enjoy, they were a most excellent mobile Saturday night.

Tom Dunne
March 2005
Nick Kelly (vocals, guitars, piano)
Tim Bradshaw (guitars, piano, keyboards, organ, violin, harmonica, mandolin, accordion, percussion, backing vocals except Track 1 / CD1)

dermot Lynch (bass, keyboards, backing vocals except Track 1 / CD1)
Robert Hamilton (drums, percussion, backing vocals on Tracks 1-7 / CD1, Tracks 2, 7, 11, 13, 15 / CD2)
Dave Sweeney (guitar on Track 1 / CD1)
Finbarr O’Riordan (bass on Track 1 / CD1)
Nic France (drums on Tracks 8, 9, 10 / CD1, Tracks 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 12 / CD2)
Steve Crease (drums on Tracks 8, 9, 14 / CD2)
Alistair Artingstall (keyboards, backing vocals on Track 9 / CD2)
Steve Osborne (keyboards, percussion, backing vocals on Tracks 8, 9, 10 / CD1, Tracks 1, 8, 12 / CD2)
Juliet Roberts (backing vocals on Track 8 / CD1)
Candy McKenzie (backing vocals on Track 8 / CD2)

track 1 / CD1, Tracks 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 14, 15 / CD2 produced by The Fat Lady Sings.
Track 2 / CD1 produced by The Fat Lady Sings & Gary Wilkinson, engineered by Gary Wilkinson.
Tracks 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 / CD1, Tracks 2, 13 / CD2 produced by The Fat Lady Sings & Mike Roarty, engineered by Mike Roarty.
Tracks 8, 9, 10 / CD1, Tracks 1, 8, 12 / CD2 produced by Steve Osborne, engineered by Paul Corkett.
Tracks 7, 11 / CD2 produced and engineered by Paul Hardman.
Track 9 / CD2 recorded live at the Mean Fiddler, London March 19th, 1993 mixed by Tim Bradshaw, engineered by Paul Corkett.
Track 1 / CD1 engineered by Paul Thomas Tracks 3, 4, 5, 6, 14 / CD2 engineered by R. Digby Smith.

All songs words and music Nick Kelly, except Track 13 / CD 2 (words and music Nick Kelly / Robert Hamilton)
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