



# Air reconditioning

70s chartbusters *Curved Air* are back on the road again.

*Peter Muir* takes tea with the band's delightful frontwoman, *Sonja Kristina*

"Oh, how lovely..." Sonja Kristina's head is tilted up to the summit of the five-storey-high atrium of London's opulent Landmark Hotel. Light has broken through the cloud and momentarily drenched the vast space, its balconies towering over the now golden-bright void at the foot of which we are taking tea in a gratifyingly expensive coffee shop.

It affords a moment to study the face that graced (along with the rest of her) the front pages of many a rock weekly back in the 1970s. A strong, almost Slavic face is immediately recognisable, as is the voice, high and fluting. Sonja Kristina is a restless creature of many projects. But today we are here to discuss *Curved Air*.

When it comes to publicity, the lot usually fell to its striking lead singer.

Some time travelling is called for... 1967: Sonja Kristina is running sessions at the Troubadour folk club and appearing on the folk scene as 'Sonja'. She has already had a number of TV slots on kids' show *Song And Story* and is briefly with The Strawbs after Sandy Denny leaves. She decides to become an actress. "I was in the stage production of *Hair* in the West End in 1968 when I met Francis [Monkman] and Darryl [Way], who were in a band called Sisyphus," she says. "Both were classically trained at the Royal College of Music – our respective managers introduced us and we just hit it off."

'Progressive' was not necessarily where the band initially sought to venture. "Darryl, Francis and I were aware of King Crimson, but also went for straight ahead rock in The Grateful Dead, Hendrix, Spirit and Jo Jo Gunne. And I came from a folk background."

Francis was into Keith Emerson's work with Nice. Darryl was studying the experimentalists, Stockhausen and Cage, at college. Sonja had brewed up an expressive vibrato on the singing of Dusty Springfield and Buffy Sainte Marie. As most fans know, the new band chose its name from Terry Riley's album *A Rainbow In Curved Air*. "We liked it because it invoked the concept of bending the atmosphere around us," Sonja reflects.

