

'The Majorca because Britain today is a miserable (even for me)



PROPERTY PLAYER: Mike at the time of the huge hit *Tubular Bells*

After last year's awful summer
Tubular Bells star Mike Oldfield
cheers up in his sunshine home

By Richard Holledge

Mike Oldfield, the musical mystic who has had his moments of torment during his 30-year career as a best-selling artist, at last seems to have found some inner peace.

He sits his coffee and contentedly raps a cigarette as he looks over the marina at Palma, Majorca, the island that has now become his permanent home.

"The main thing is being able to live without having this terrible work drive," says the creator of *Tubular Bells*, the epic instrumental that took the charts by storm 35 years ago and has since sold more than eight million copies.

"I've spent years recording studios trying to create the perfect track - always pushing, he says, describing the toll on his latest album *MUSIC OF SPHERES*, which is being released in March. "I've had enough."

He has also had enough of Britain and has swapped Old Down House in Lockington, Gloucestershire, with 54 acres, for a five-bedroom villa in rural Majorca with a 70ft-long motor yacht moored in nearby Palma.

"I'm happiest in my dinghy, going out on my own in the bay with nothing but me and the waves. I stop the motor and feel the peace. It's a feeling I have never had before," says Oldfield, who worked as a bass guitarist on the Sixties musical *Hair*, while he had a hand in the dream to launch a career that has earned him \$15 million.

At a chance meeting with Richard Branson not only won him a record deal but also introduced Oldfield to the Balearic Islands where the Bransons had family connections -



RELAXED: Mike with wife Fanny

Richard's mother, Eve, was a pioneering estate agent in the Fifties. Oldfield, 54, is a restless character, with two marriages - one of which lasted only a month to the leader of a self-help group he had attended to increase his assertiveness - and two long-term relationships which produced five children. Now with his second wife, French-born Fanny, three-year-old son Jake and a baby on the way, the troubadour has bought his fourth house in less than ten years.

He sold the Gloucestershire home for just under £3.5 million, a handsome profit since he bought it for £2.1 million two years earlier.

"Given that the market is flattening, it was a fair price," he says. "I had built an indoor pool and a conservatory as well as my studio, but there was still work to be done. As well as chilling out on the yacht, the family will use it to visit a flat

they rent in Monaco as a winter base. Oldfield cites many reasons for leaving Britain, including last year's awful summer.

"I was on the M5 in Birmingham," he recalls. The rain was thundering down so hard it was like the Colorado Rapids. If I hadn't got off the motorway I would have been stuck there overnight. It took me five hours to get home.

"I talked with my wife and said, 'You know, we don't have to live here, we could go somewhere else.' I had experimented living in Ibiza during the Nineties and I thought I could do something like that again so we decided to come here and start a new life."

Within days, the family, with spaniel Pluff and two horses, were on their way. "We found this beautiful place on the plains 20 minutes from Palma almost at once," he says. "It is not finished yet. It doesn't have electricity so we have a generator which we run up with cans of diesel."

Water comes in a tanker and we use the rainwater from the gutters for the garden. The previous owner did bore a well but we don't have enough electricity to power the pump.

"I miss the comforts of life, though. When there is no electricity you feel lost. I can't put it TV, nothing works. Essentially the services might be nice but it's going to take some time.

The house, which was built two years ago and was on the market for £1.2 million, has five bedrooms, two main living areas and a big kitchen/dining area. A large, shady, patio overlooks the pool and across

the gardens to the stables. Oldfield's studio is on the ground floor with piles of boxes full of unwanted cables and equipment stacked outside.

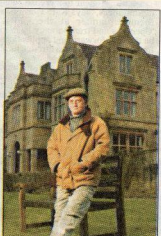
"All you need now is a laptop, a keyboard and a couple of speakers," says the man who created *Tubular Bells* playing 20 instruments himself as well as using 2,000 tapes for dubbing the tracks and working with two full-time sound engineers.

Oldfield's new house illustrates a property trend in Majorca, where buyers are forced to look inland, thanks to a moratorium last October on coastal building. He is also buying into a strong market where prices slowed to ten per cent growth last year, after doubling in the five years to 2000.

The house is a mile down rutted roads of red dust with views of the snow-capped mountains to the north. "It feels like the real Spain here," he says. "I especially when the tourists have gone. I have three motorbikes and I love riding off-road, exploring the countryside where there are some lovely villages, all with a church, a square and a restaurant with really good Spanish food."

"The only thing to disturb the peace is the chugging of the generator, so he spends most of his time on his boat which he uses as an office. "I learned how to drive the yacht so that we can sail to Monaco, and when the baby is born we'll go there for a couple of months because it's a better place for the winter."

Curiously for a man who spent months in solitude on Herge Island in rural Shropshire - which inspired



SQUIRE: At his old Gloucester pile

his second album - he has no wish to return home.

"In England, there's a sort of shroud of cloud which can stay for months. It's terribly depressing. It was all right when I was working and would dive into the studio but after this last album I don't feel I have the drive to work any more.

"Then they banned smoking in pubs and that was the last straw," he says. "We used to play football and cricket on the streets, it was so much safer. Our heroes were people such as Spitfire pilots, not footballers. That

has become more violent. But here, the esplanade is packed with Spanish teenagers every weekend, all having a riot of a time, and I haven't heard one stron or seen any violence."

With his new, all-classical album completed, Oldfield can relax. It took him nine months to create the work, which involved 86 musicians, including pianist Lang Lang and singer Hayley Westenra. The album has the trademark, Oldfield tintinnabulations and is about the ancient theory that every celestial body, the sun, the moon, and the stars, has an inner music."

He says: "I am still able to go into very high concentration mode but I find it very exhausting. Now, the most exciting thing that happens to us is the coming and going of the local shepherd and his 200 sheep."

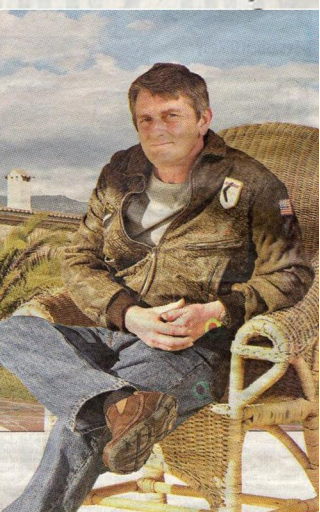
Quite a contrast to his spell in Ibiza where he went through a phase of 'partying' so outlandish that he described it as being 'half-way down the corridor towards total madness'.

"It's nice getting up feeling fresh and not with a hangover, not regretting what you might have done the night before.

"Going to bed early and waking early, seeing the sun rise, it's a beautiful thing. When you're 54 you have a limited number of years to go and you need to be able to enjoy them."

"Now life is all about comfort, wearing some shorts and soaking up the sunshine. It's so soothing for the soul."

● *MUSIC OF THE SPHERES*, Universal Music, is available from March 17.



SOUNDING UP: Mike is enjoying life in Majorca without the pressure of having to create music

Island that just gets better

Majorca has retained its position as Spain's top upmarket destination because of the expansion of the road network and redevelopment of Palma's waterfront and docks, says Andrew Hawkins, of Chester International.