



(Banner by Sven Kramer)

Since the last newsletter we have had quite an influx of new readers. Welcome to you all. We look forward to hearing from you.

This month we have an interesting interview Russ did for a German magazine in 1985. Many thanks to Greg Zimmermann for translating it from the German for us. The introduction is not quite accurate.... I have read several times that Russ was in the Zombies but he wasn't.

It is pure coincidence that we had the Ola & The Janglers track last month and Russ mentions them again in this interview.

We have some potentially good news from Russ. Let's all keep our fingers crossed!

Sue

## THIS MONTH

**Russ:** *"I've revisited a 'Live' album I recorded some years ago and I never listened to it all the way through, until six weeks ago. I thought it sounded good and I asked my son Christian if he would mix it, he said he would.....so, I'm hoping to put this out in 2019. I also will have 'It's Good To Be Here' released. I*

*don't know which will come first but they will both be ready. For people that heard 'It's Good To Be Here', I now have probably eight or ten new songs that I wrote and mixed, and want to add a few to I. G. T. B. H. My dilemma is, which songs to include? As it happens, by the time Spring 2019 gets here, I'll probably have three albums to release... - [You wait for one and three come along]*

*This past few weeks, I've also revisited the autobiography that I started a some years ago. I hadn't actually thought about doing a memoir....It was 2007, when I was a part of the R.D. Crusaders, the group that Roger Daltrey started to raise money for the Teenage Cancer Trust...I saw Roger at Adam Faith's funeral and he told me he was raising money for the organisation and he'd recruited Richard Desmond to play drums - [Richard was also owner of The Daily Express, Daily Star and OK magazine so, knew people in high places], also, conveniently, apart from being a good drummer, he had the initials R.D.....So, R.D Crusaders were born. Also in the group we had Greg Lake on bass and Simon Townsend on guitar and Zoot Money. Richard suggested we rehearse at his beautiful home in Mallorca - Everyday we'd go for a walk to THE HILL' as Richard called it....usually we'd run up the THE HILL, then walk down. The chats on the way down were often brilliant - one particular day, we sat and had a beer on the beach. Richard asked me questions about my life and he appeared quite moved and said "Write your autobiography, I'll publish it". Anyway, I started writing and actually got to the 1980's....Well! I've picked up from there.....Who knows, there could be three albums and an autobiography.*

*Have a great September....Be Lucky x"*

## **LETTERS**

### **From Tony Dawson-Hill**

The Ola and The Janglers track is interesting – it was produced by Ivor Raymonde who was responsible for arranging and producing so many classic sixties songs. I have just bought a new CD compiled by his son Simon – Paradise – The Sound of Ivor Raymonde that has some of the best stuff he was responsible for arranging and/or producing. Unfortunately Ola & The Janglers is not on it but apparently there are more releases in the pipeline – so it might appear on a future release.

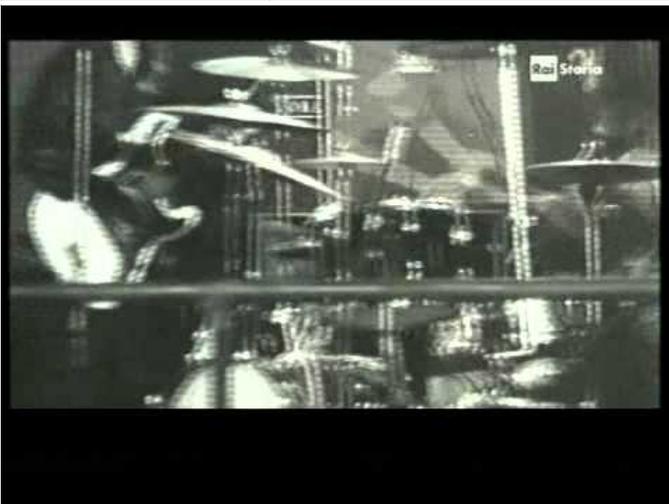
**Russ:** *"Funny thing...Speaking of Ivor Raymonde, I met his son, Nick, a few weeks ago at the BMG summer party and he told me about this album. Ivor wrote "I Only Wanna Be With You". Dusty Springfield's version was brilliant wasn't it?"*

## ARGENT VIDEO

I saw this video, for the first time recently. Made live at a festival in Rome in 1972 and in black and white.... early Argent.

<https://youtu.be/lul7CpomLVc>

[live @ ARGENT -  
Festival Avanguardia e  
Nuove Tendenze,  
Roma 1972 pt. 8  
youtu.be](https://youtu.be/lul7CpomLVc)



## INTERVIEW

Translated from German by Greg Zimmermann

### **RUSS BALLARD – Song Factory (October 1985)**

This interview was conducted by Antonia Langsdorf and Harold Mac Wonderlea and appeared in edition number 10 in October 1985 of German musicians' magazine, "Fachblatt Musik Magazin".

Even if you have never heard the name Russ Ballard before – you will surely be familiar with one of his many songs that have entered the charts. The very first recording of his music took place in the mid-sixties on an LP by the Shadows. The band took the song «Atlantis», penned by a fourteen-year old boy, and released it five years later as «Lost City». Russ at that time was already active as a singer and guitarist – first with Unit 4+2 and then with The Zombies, who eventually morphed into Argent, a band he helped form with Rod Argent. It wasn't long before they had their first big hit entitled «Hold Your Head Up».

Russ left Argent and started his solo career both as an artist and a songwriter for others. News of his obvious talent spread quickly, and musicians, managers and producers were soon standing in line to order songs for themselves or their bands. Among his clients were America («You Can Do Magic»), Santana («Winning», «Nowhere To Run»), Frida («There's Something Going On»), Pointer Sisters, Hot Chocolate, The Who, Roger Daltrey, Rainbow, Rupert Hine, and the list goes on.

No wonder then there's a deep respect on our part when we're assigned to interview the man. We were sure to be meeting a very serene and cool bloke who has seen it all and who greets journalists with no more than tired courtesy. We were wrong. Russ Ballard is a slim and youthful, even boyish man who likes a laugh and who clearly loves his work.

His secret to creating songs is nothing spectacular: discipline. The 38-year-old family man goes to his 16-track studio at 9 am every day, ideally located in his home in the rural countryside surrounding London.

Time was much too short for this conversation. Russ, nothing less than a living piece of rock'n'roll history, infuses his tales with so much charm, knowledge and enthusiasm that we would have loved to listen to him for days!

**FB:** We learned in an interview with you that you already worked at Abbey Road studios at the tender age of fourteen. How did you get into music so early?

**Russ:** I was in school the first time I was at a studio. Musically, I started on the drums, that was my first instrument. My dad was a drummer, so that came naturally to me. He would always take his drumkit home, and so I learned to play it. Dad wanted me to learn to play the piano though, and so I took piano lessons for five years. It was mostly classical music, and I was aged eight to thirteen. I wasn't that keen on practicing all the time, it was hard work, even though I really liked the piano as an instrument very much. I wasn't too crazy about classical music either, except some of the more popular pieces. When Elvis Presley, The Beatles and all those blues guitarists appeared on the scene, I knew I wanted to play the guitar. I admired people such as Scotty Moore and Chet Atkins. I started playing the guitar at age 13. I was already writing my own songs at that time, I've been composing for as long as I can remember. Even when I

was at home with my parents and practicing on the piano, I always tried to develop new melodies from different chords. The Shadows then recorded one of my first songs. I wrote it when I was 14.

**FB:** What was the title of that song?

**Russ:** When I recorded it, it was called “Atlantis”. I know Cliff Richard’s family quite well, and when his brother heard my song, he said, “Russ, it would make a really good instrumental, I’ll play it for The Shadows.” So we sent the piece to their publishing company and didn’t hear from them at first. Five years came and went, I turned professional at 16, I travelled the world, The Beatles and The Stones were happening. So then, after five years, the publisher of The Shadows rang me and said, “The Shadows have recorded one of your songs, it will be included on their next album. Your piece is called “Atlantis” but there is already a well-known song with that title. I said, “Yeah I know.” So he said, “Can you think of a new title?” “OK”, I said, “when I think of something, I’ll give you a ring.” But this bloke said, “No, that won’t do, I need a title now. We’re all sitting here, working on the credits for the new album.” So I thought for a moment, I thought, hm, Atlantis...Lost City! And that was that.

**FB:** So it’s fair to say you started your career as a songwriter for other artists?

**Russ:** I suppose so. When I was 16 ½, I took part in many sessions in and around London, and I worked a great deal with Adam Faith, who at the time was quite a popular British singer. I was on the road with him a lot, and we made many records together. Then came Unit 4+2 where I played mainly guitar and bells. I was busy working as a musician in the band and stopped composing for a while. After The Shadows had recorded my song, there was a Swedish band who recorded one of my songs. Ole & The Janglers were quite well-known in Sweden. That was in 1965, and I had a verse in my head. It was the exact same melody I used years later when I wrote “So You Win Again” for Hot Chocolate. I had liked this melody for years, but it never came to anything, until it all fit in 1972.

**FB:** Does it often happen that you carry ideas and fragments around for years until a proper song evolves?

**Russ:** Oh yes! I’m actually writing all the time. I get an idea and think, “Hey, this is quite good”, and then it suddenly dawns on me that I’ve been carrying this melody around for five years. This occurs especially when I listen to old tapes.

**FB:** You have written many songs for others over the years. How does it happen? Do people come to you and say, “Please write a song for me”?

**Russ:** There are many different ways. Before Rainbow recorded “Since You’ve Been Gone”, they had been on tour in the USA with opening act Head East who had already recorded a version of the song. The boys in Rainbow heard it and liked it, and so they recorded it too. It was a big hit, three times by different people.

Other people cover songs, Keith Olsen for example, who was producing Santana at the time. Keith called me and asked if it was OK, and then they recorded it. A little while later, my manager John Stanley got a ring from John Ryan who said, "I'm producing Santana, we'd like to have a song." That was "Nowhere To Run".

**FB:** In what shape do you give your songs to other artists? Do you always record a demo?

**Russ:** Yes I do. I normally record 24-track demos, but now I have my own 16-track studio at home. I have learned to record my demos at home all by myself, although my studio is technically not on the same level as a professional 24-track studio, so the sound I get is not of the highest quality. On the other hand, this helps me learn how a sound engineer works. This is something that has always interested me. I find it harder and harder to convey to a sound engineer exactly what's in my head. It's a bit like sitting in a car and telling the driver, "Now take a left – not that much left!" If I tell a sound engineer, "More top", chances are it will mean something entirely different to him. So the only way to get exactly what you want is to do it yourself. And I've been learning this for a good two years now. I spend hours every day with things like equalisation, digital delays, reverbs, gates, compressors and limiters.

**FB:** Is that why you play not only guitar on your new album "The Fire Still Burns", but also keyboards, drums and bass on some songs?

**Russ:** Actually, I had wanted to work with Simon Phillips again, but he was too busy and couldn't do it. On bass, I have Mo Foster again for some songs. I didn't play much drums but mainly programmed the Linn machine. The Linn machine does sound a bit thin, and so I got Stuart Elliott of The Alan Parsons Project who did overdubs on a Simmons drum machine. I think next time I'll have a complete band again.

**FB:** Who are the musicians who do the TV appearances with you these days?

**Russ:** There's Mike Richardson on the drums, who helped out on the album as well. He's a very good friend of mine. On bass, there's Pete Quaife, former bassist with The Kinks. And on keyboards, we have Mike Benn who used to play with Fisher Z. It's hard putting a band together, even when you don't go out on tour, because good musicians are always so busy, and they're expensive too. I would love to have my own band, but it's just too expensive in the long run.

**FB:** It's a good thing then you are able to play all the instruments yourself.

**Russ:** Yes, and I also love doing it.

**FB:** If memory serves, you once recorded an album where you played every single instrument yourself.

**Russ:** Yes, I had to get it out of my system... Apart from the strings, I played everything myself. I always play everything myself on my demos anyway. You know, I've had musicians in the past who didn't meet my

expectations, who were unable to play exactly what I wanted to hear. I'm the kind of guy who hates telling a drummer, "what you're playing is wrong", I'd rather play it myself. But I get on extremely well with both Simon Phillips and Mo Foster, I enjoy working with them.

**FB:** Have you ever worked with musicians who came up with their own ideas that you approved of?

**Russ:** I once did an album with Toto. Jeff Porcaro on the drums, David Paich on keyboards. Steve Porcaro and David Foster. Tom Scott. That was the band – who is going to tell those guys what to play? It was hard and the worst album to do for me. Everybody was on such an ego trip. I did learn however that you don't need to get musicians with big names to make good music. On the contrary, according to my experiences.

**FB:** When you go into a studio to record an album, is it all finished in your head and on your demos? Do you proceed according to an exact plan?

**Russ:** Well, I'm not as pedantic as I used to be or as I am when I make demos for others! I used to take those things quite seriously. But I think it's better to go into a studio and be open to fresh ideas and spontaneity. That's how I do it now, and I believe it's much better. Plus, I enjoy recording and engineering more. All of which helps me to get what I really want to hear.

**FB:** So it's possible for you to compose a new song on the spot?

**Russ:** Oh, that has happened several times. Frida's song "There Is Something Going On" happened out of the blue in the studio. I was working on a different song at the time and programming my Linn. Suddenly, there was this drum beat coming out of the speakers, lots of reverb. It was the first time I heard this special drum sound and got very excited. And excitement can breed ideas. I started playing a bass line, and even though I didn't have any words at that point, the whole song came together in my head. I went home, wrote the lyrics, and that was the song. The whole thing didn't take more than an hour.

**FB:** But you didn't know that Frida would record the song. How did it end up with her? Personally, I think it's the best song Frida ever recorded.

**Russ:** I think so too! I also think that having Phil Collins as producer was a good choice for her, for she has a great voice and can really sing. We heard that she was about to do a solo record, and someone had the idea to get the song to her. We sent her three songs, and Frida liked "There Is Something Going On" the best.

**FB:** Do artists come up to you and ask you if you could write one or several songs for them, or do you always have a number of finished songs lying in your drawer?

**Russ:** I often write at someone's request. I wrote a complete album for Roger Daltrey a few years ago, and I'd been asked beforehand whether I would write songs for the film "McVicar", where Roger had a role. So I wrote "Free Me" for Roger. As it happens, Roger called me three months ago, asking me if I could write two songs for his upcoming albums, or if

not two, then at least one. And so I wrote a song which will be included on his new album. Believe it or not, I went round to Roger's session, played guitar on my song and learned that his new album was going to be called "The Fire Still Burns". Pete Townshend wrote the opening song and underneath the line "After The Fire" he added "The Fire Still Burns" in brackets. When I told them that my new album would be called "The Fire Still Burns", they changed it to "Under A Raging Moon". It's a very good album by the way, I think it's the best Roger has ever done.

**FB:** Is there a difference whether you write a song for someone else or use it for yourself?

**Russ:** No difference. I wrote a song entitled "New York Groove" for a teenie band called Hello many years ago. Ace Frehley recorded the song a few years later too. I was in the studio, and Hello's manager called me and wanted a song. At that point, I only had the title and a rough idea what the words were. So I got the band into the studio, I wasn't being very serious, and it worked out fine. I stood the boys with their platform boots on a wooden table in the hallway of the studio and recorded the sound when they stomped their boots in time with the music. The kids loved such things.

I did write a number of other songs on request. For America, I wrote "You Can Do Magic", for The Pointer Sisters I wrote two songs that ended up on two different albums. I also wrote a song "Come And Get Your Love" that was originally intended for Roger Daltrey. We recorded it, it was a kind of soul song, and The Pointer Sisters recorded it as well. Then I wrote a number specifically for them, "Some Day, We'll Be Together". You find it on their album "Black & White".

**FB:** How do you do it? Do you sit down and say, "I'm going to write a new song now"?

**Russ:** That is exactly what I do every day. I love working but I never get too stubborn about it. I use fragments, for example, when you say something to me, there may be a succession of words that stick with me that I can use. Or a few single notes on the piano, the synthesiser or the guitar. Anything can be an inspiration. I always like working with a set title. I had the title "The Fire Still Burns" before I had one single note of music or a lyric. I sit there thinking about the title, and then all kinds of associations happen in my head. So when the feeling I get is hard and tough, then the song must have a hard drum sound of course, it must all fit together. Flames and smoke and stuff like that are ideal for provoking a certain feeling. We used to have a song with Argent that I wish I had written, "Dancing In The Smoke".

**FB:** When our editor asked us to interview you, I sifted through my records and found among a few other Argent LPs a double live album. In those photos, you are playing the same guitar you are playing today in the TV show. The holes in the body of the guitar are very noticeable.

**Russ:** Originally, this was a plain Stratocaster from 1959 or 1960. Back then, I asked a friend what I should do to make the guitar look different from a normal Strat. So we drilled those holes in the body and changed it a bit. We also drilled holes in the headstock, it looked quite funny. But then, during a gig in America, I threw the guitar high up in the air, it hit a spot light, changed its trajectory and fell to the floor. The neck broke off and was then replaced with a Telecaster neck.

**FB:** Is this your main guitar?

**Russ:** No, I use mainly a Gibson nowadays. I bought myself a copy of the old Standard, a Heritage. It's a beautiful guitar that I played a lot on the new album.

**FB:** What amps do you use?

**Russ:** Marshall amps, both on stage and in the studio. I have also tried going straight into the mixing desk in the studio, with a little Boss distortion. You get great sounds when you play with your fingernails, it almost sounds like a synthesiser.

**FB:** Are there any plans to go out on tour?

**Russ:** Yes there are. We will try to come to Germany towards the end of the year.

**FB:** What do you prefer, working in the studio or standing on stage and performing live?

**Russ:** That's a tough question, they are so completely different things. You are isolated in the studio, you work eight hours or more within those walls. And then suddenly you're on stage in front of people, and you get a reaction from them. You can't compare the two.

**FB:** What's your opinion on home recording? Many young musicians don't go to their rehearsal rooms and practice anymore, but rather have a multi-track system at home and do their recordings there.

**Russ:** Well, the good thing about home recording is the fact that you can get to work quite easily. I can speak from my own experience, for I don't like going into a large studio I had to book, because there is always pressure to come up with something. You always watch the clock. And if you have a bad day, you lose a lot of money – up to 2,000 Deutschmarks a day.

**FB:** Any advice you can give to people starting out as composers and put their demos on tape?

**Russ:** I would say this: A really good song will always come through. It doesn't matter how it's been recorded. If you haven't got a good song, you can do what you want, book the most expensive studio, it will still never be a hit. But you can't suppress a really good song. Today, many people talk about digital recording, and it's certainly a good thing, but it won't help a song just because it's now digital.

**FB:** I have noticed that your songs are nearly always very harmonic and melodic. What makes a good song?

**Russ:** Well, that's hard to say. I think a song must have a very good melody, and it must be performed very well. Then the rest won't matter. Do you remember Edwin Hawkins and his choir? They had this piece, "Oh Happy Day". This is a good example. The song was recorded in a church somewhere, the drummer is miles away, it's all very unorthodox. But the song went to number 1 all over the world! You know why? It's such a good song and such a good performance. This wasn't about digital, it was about the right atmosphere, and that's important.

## DAVE'S COVER QUEST

### From Dave Williams

Whilst writing my articles I've discovered scores of versions of songs written by Russ, some well-known, others less so. It started to become something of a quest to discover as many songs as possible. There's lots of material out there and I thought it might be nice to share some of these discoveries with readers. Here's this month's offering:

### No.2



### Oh What a Night For Romance by Stephanie de Sykes

The lovely Stephanie de Sykes began her career as an actress who turned to singing as a means of supplementing her income between acting roles. As a member of the **Birds of Paris** she provided backing vocals to many hits in the 1970s disco era, alongside fellow members **Madeline Bell** and **Vicki Brown**. However, she is best remembered for her 1974 hit **Born with a Smile on My Face**, written by Simon May, which reached No2 in the UK singles chart. A year later she found further success when she appeared as singer Holly Brown in the

UK Soap Opera **Crossroads**, which featured her singing **We'll Find Our Day** at Meg Mortimer's wedding. This will most likely mean nothing to anyone born after the 1970s and certainly not to any of our subscribers outside of the UK. Trust me, the Birmingham based soap was of its time and is best left to rest, but if you feel the urge to sample a few scenes, try typing the words **Benny and Miss Diane** or **Amy Turtle** into the You Tube search engine, but don't say I didn't warn you!

After a long absence from the charts, during which time Stephanie became involved in co-writing potential UK entries for Eurovision, she released this catchy **Russ Ballard** composition in 1979. Like the Ola & the Janglers song last month, this is one I've only recently come across. The song is interesting in that it contains elements of **Expressway To Your Heart** which Russ wrote and recorded for his **At the Third Stroke** album during the same period. Here are two links; one is for the record, the second is a slightly fuzzy copy of the promotional video, which I believe was posted by Stephanie herself.

**Russ:** *"I forgot about this one - Very much a formula... those were days I had to write twenty songs a year to fulfill my publishing commitment - and they were demo'd. It doesn't pay. She looked very pretty...I'm sure I used I Stephanie on sessions with Leo Sayer because Madeline Bell and Vicki Brown often sang BV's for us and I remember there was a blonde girl often there...that must have been Stephanie."*

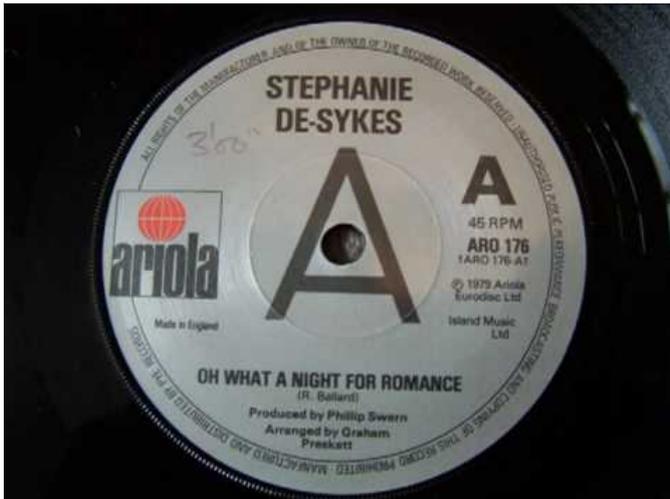
[https://youtu.be/YaLmlbN\\_a-0](https://youtu.be/YaLmlbN_a-0)

[Stephanie De Sykes](#)  
['Oh What A Night For](#)  
[Romance'. 1979.](#)

[youtu.be](#)

Released on Ariola in 1979.

Produced by Phillip 'The  
Collector' Swern.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_6tStXwsyCo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6tStXwsyCo)

["Oh What a Night for](#)  
[Romance" Stephanie](#)  
[De-Sykes](#)

[www.youtube.com](#)

Promo Video

