



(Banner by Sven Kramer)

Happy New Year to everyone and a very big welcome to our new readers.

2016 is shaping up to be an exciting year for Russ and his fans. At last we are going to see him on tour in the UK! Starting with An Evening With...then another gig in January at the "Giants of Rock" festival in Minehead. Then there will be a short wait until the tour kicks off in Devon in March. I know lots of you have tickets for one or more (mostly more!!) of these events and will be getting as excited as I am! I am counting on some of you sending us your 2016 Tour stories for inclusion in the newsletter.

Sue

THIS MONTH...

Russ: "Christmas was quiet-ish, which is how I like it. I had a week away with Karis, Sam, Emilio and Elodie - It's good to have quality time with Family....Sometimes, we tend to take Loved ones for granted without realising it until you get away from the familiar sites.

It seems I spent most of December going over songs for the up-coming shows - swatting up on lyrics and arrangements of songs...very enjoyable, though. It's not long now until 'An Evening With' - That will be fun, also, I'll have some friends joining me for some of the show.

Had a day with Brian May and Kerry Ellis...We played some songs together, and it sounded brilliant...Brian's surrounded himself with great, easy going people....I've always said, music should be fun and it was. Now, can't wait to get together and play them live with them as we've rehearsed them...They're both special People..."

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Russ: "Tribalism

It's so obvious, when one goes abroad, to see how Tribal Humans are, and it's probably the main reason for most turbulence on Earth - We separate ourselves from each other in so many ways...Religions, Nationalities, Towns, Football Teams - [Mine's better than yours] - When you watch the news, just listen to the Newscasters words...Separation is built in to language....It helps when we see it."

TRACKS OF MY YEARS

Have you been listening? Russ has chosen some good tracks and is giving interesting interviews. As I send this there are 2 more days to go. If you missed it you can hear it on iPlayer and even download it to your phone or tablet via the BBC Radio iPlayer app. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006wr34>

THE TOUR

Here are the gig dates again with links for buying tickets.

Sat 5th March - Torrington Plough Arts, Great Torrington, Devon <http://www.theploughartscentre.org.uk/>

Tues 8th March - Milton Keynes, Stables [http://www.stables.org/Whats_on/Event/Russ Ballard](http://www.stables.org/Whats_on/Event/Russ_Ballard)

Fri 11th March - Gwynedd HRH AOR Festival <http://www.hrhaor.com/line-up/friday-line-up.html>

Sat 12th March - The Flowerpot, Derby http://www.rawpromo.co.uk/gig_guide.html

Sun 13th March - Robin 2, Bilston, Wolverhampton http://www.therobin.co.uk/whats_on/?m=201603

Russ is now playing at the "Giants of Rock" weekend at Butlins Minehead, starting on Friday 29th January 2016. (See the poster in attachments.) [http://www.bigweekends.com/the-weekends/specialist-music-weekends/giants-of-rock.aspx#ico=TW Giants](http://www.bigweekends.com/the-weekends/specialist-music-weekends/giants-of-rock.aspx#ico=TW_Giants) This is an amazing line up. It was Butlins who changed Russ's appearance from Skegness to Minehead, not Russ. I know

some readers bought tickets for Skegness as soon as they saw that Russ was billed.

AN EVENING WITH....

I know a lot of you are going to this on 20th January....very soon now! And the secret is out....Russ will be joined in the second half by Brian May and Kerry Ellis. It is shaping up to be a really interesting evening. It is almost sold out so, if you want to go but haven't got tickets yet, you need to get them NOW!

YOUR LETTERS

In the November newsletter, we had a letter from Brian Gull about a band that Russ played in with Norman Jago when he was very young. Brian's letter below refers to the band. The photo Brian sent is in attachments.

Hi Sue,

Came across this photo... they were called Norman Eddy and the Imperials. I knew them all...from left next to Russ is Bob Henrit, Norman Jago, Lennie Gypps, Russ's brother Roy and Bill Brown.
Brian.

YOUR QUESTIONS

This question about Russ's 'holey guitar' appeared in the newsletter when it first started nearly three years ago. With the tour coming up, when the guitar will be making an appearance, the fact that we now have many readers who have joined us since and it being mentioned by Richard (below), we thought we could put it in again. (See attachment for a photo by Gareth Hughes)

About Russ's guitar with holes in it. Is it true that he simply thought it would look cool and proceeded to drill those holes into the body of his guitar?

Russ: *"The Holey Guitar - It's a strange thing, there's a lot of stuff online about that guitar - many people have copied it - There's a company making the guitar....Feline Guitars of Croydon. Originally, it was a 1965 Strat....When Argent started, I wanted a different looking instrument. I asked my good friend, Jim Wilkinson to cut some holes in it....[I liked those holey, metal chairs that were popular in the sixties]. It didn't have a Telecaster neck in the 'Hold Your Head Up' days, I threw the guitar up in America, it fell and the neck split. The repairer wrongly fitted a tele neck. I still have it and it sounds better now than ever."*

YOUR STORIES

From Richard Westwood.

I first saw Russ in The Roulettes at Wednesbury Youth Club. I'm not sure of the year; either 1963 or 1964 I think. The Roulettes asked if they could start a bit later than normal so that they could watch a recording of the Heavyweight Championship fight. I had seen the Roulettes many times on the TV with Adam Faith, but this was the first time I had seen this very young guy in dark glasses who appeared to be the leader of the group, who sang most of the songs and played killer lead guitar. Dark glasses may be pretty normal these days, but back then they were unusual. They were also very cool!

The second time I saw Russ and The Roulettes was at Brooklyn Technical College, probably in 1965 or 1966. They were being supported by local band Finders Keepers. Bob Henrit had been my favourite drummer for a long time - in fact, Bob is the reason I play the drums myself - and it was a big thrill to see his black Gretsch kit in the flesh. I met all The Roulettes that night and Fred the roadie gave me one of Bobs drum sticks (a Gretsch Art Blakey model) which I kept for many years until my wife decided it was the perfect thing with which to stir a tin of paint. We had words. Russ was playing a Gretsch Country Gent guitar that sounded lovely and rich. I think that they all had Vox AC50's rather than the more usual AC30's.

The third time I saw Russ was at The Adelphi in West Bromwich when he and Bob were playing in Argent. The year was either late 1969 or early 1970. I expected Rod Argent to be the front man of the band, but in fact Russ took charge of proceedings from the off, which was "Stepping Stone" sung through a diabolical Laney PA. I spent quite a long time talking to Bob Henrit that night - he was a very friendly guy who had no idea how much much he was my drum hero! This was the first time I ever saw the Fender Stratocaster with all the

holes - it looked like a piece of Meccanno. Russ was wearing a vest, tight leather trousers and black leather motorbike boots. The PA was so bad that I never heard a word either he or Rod sang that night. But Russ and Bob seemed to have perfected the art of strong presentation and both were visually mesmerising that night.

I saw Argent many times subsequently, at Birmingham Town Hall, Wolverhampton Civic Hall and on The Old Grey Whistle Test. Not forgetting "Hold Your Head Up" and "Tragedy" on Top of The Pops.

I saw Argent most recently at The Robin in Bilston where they made two appearances.

I also remember seeing Russ and Colin Blunstone on a Saturday early evening programme whose name escapes me performing "I Don't Believe In Miracles" with Russ playing the piano and doing harmonies. I keep hoping to find this one day on You Tube but no luck so far.

My favourite Russ Ballard album is "At The Third Stroke." Jeff Porcaro on the drums for goodness sake. I read an interview with him where he said recording that album with Russ was more of a musical highlight than playing on "Thriller." Not a bad thing to have on your cv!

Regards,
Richard

RECORDED BY OTHERS

With Brian May supporting of Russ at his 'Evening' coming up, here is the Brian May Band and Since You've Been Gone...a live version recorded at Brixton Academy, London, in 1993. On drums is Cozy Powell, who played on the Rainbow 1979 legendary version of the song.

<https://youtu.be/T3qqRZhWzDI>

Russ: " Cozy played on 'I surrender' too....I also spent a day recording with Cozy on Graham Bonnets album 1978 or '79He was a solid drummer. I remember, he said to me that evening, "Heavy drumming isn't about playing loud, it's all about dis-placing air" I know what he meant...I think you could say 'Digging in' as apposed to 'Banging hard'.

It was on that session where I suggested to Graham Bonnet he could record a hard version of 'Be My Baby' ...It surprised me when he actually did record the song."

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