



Many readers of this newsletter go back to Russ's Roulettes days, some came on board with Argent and many found Russ later for various reasons. After last month's conversation about Russ's work between Dave Williams and Scott Winter, we thought there might be some readers who are not fully familiar with Russ's solo work. From this month, Dave will be writing a series of articles about Russ's solo albums plus other parts of Russ's musical history.

Sue

## THIS MONTH

**Russ:** *"I mentioned last month, I'm playing at a festival, guesting with the Trevor Horn Band. The show is The Cropredy Festival in Oxfordshire. Trevor asked me to play 'Since You Been Gone'. Although we played it together less than a year ago, it is however, a little confusing. I first recorded the song the year I wrote it in 1975. It was covered quickly by a few groups, including girl group 'Clout' and American band 'Head East' and later, 'Rainbow'. All the groups recorded the song in the original key, which is G...When I started to play the song live, I played it in E, so, I played the guitar solos in E. When I guested with Ritchie Blackmore one month ago, he had transposed the song in to F...so, I spent two days before that show learning the solos in F. Now I'm back playing it in G, although the solos are now in A!!*

*On a tour we get used to changes but for one show it's sometimes difficult to remember where you are, anyway, it's still great fun and I'm looking forward to the show Thursday (10th)...I'll talk about the show next month...*

*Enjoy your holidays.*

*Love,  
Russ"*

## VIDEO

I was reminded about this video recently. Such a good video and well worth watching. Argent's God Gave Rock n Roll comes up on TV quite often but not this one.

The second of Argent's three hits and from the album All Together Now.

<https://youtu.be/Vt-cmi3MdUY>



## [Argent - Tragedy - Top of The Pops - 1972](#)

[youtu.be](#)

...Argent perform their classic "Tragedy" on Top Of The Pops on the 22nd June 1972...

## QUESTION

The song "Schoolgirl" - is it really the story of your childhood, you meant every phrase and your personal feelings? Or is it just an abstract story, which could happen with anyone?

Russ: *"Schoolgirl" came from my thinking about things we all do when we're very young...Most of the words came from little games all kids play - Truth & Dare - Kiss Chase....do you remember? Sounds very tame now!"*

## RUSS'S MUSICAL HISTORY

From Dave Williams

With subscriptions to the newsletter on the increase, we thought it might be interesting for those who are relatively new to the music of Russ Ballard to include a feature that takes a look at his previous work. In this issue we jump into our "time machine" to 1974 to take a look at the beginnings of his solo career.

**Russ Ballard (1974) Epic Records S EPC 80341**



Following his departure from Argent, there wasn't too long a wait until his Russ' first solo "LP" appeared in the record stores. In my case, it came as a surprise when I stumbled on it, as I'd not been aware of its impending release. I seem to recall that it appeared at the exact same time as Argent's Encore double album, which caused me a dilemma. My pocket money wouldn't stretch to buying both so it had to be one or the other. An attempt to find the exact release dates seems to suggest that the Russ Ballard debut album arrived before Encore, so maybe my memory is playing tricks on me. Regardless, I have a full-page music paper cutting dated November 9th 1974 featuring an advert. It announces Russ' arrival as a solo artist with the words *"He's written songs for everyone except himself; Now things have changed. He's on his own singing, writing, playing. This is BALLARD THE PERFORMER"*. A glance at the reverse side of the LP sleeve confirms this. Russ played all the instruments; guitar, keyboards, bass, drums, harmonica and sang lead and backing vocals (not at the same time you understand. I doubt even Russ could manage that...but then again?). He did employ the services of some saxophonists, though it was no surprise to read that Russ took charge of the brass arrangements. As for production credits, these are shared between Dan Loggins and, you guessed it, Russ Ballard. Incidentally, I've always found it odd that saxophones are classed as woodwind instruments, although they are made of brass. How strange.

A quick word on the album sleeve. The design was carried out by a gentleman called Roslav Szabo who also created the designs for Argent's Nexus album and The Zombies compilation Time of the Zombies. Both the front and back look good, the latter featuring a great photo of Russ.

So what prompted Russ to take on so much responsibility on his first solo outing? Interviewed after its release, Russ said it was something he'd wanted to do for some time, something he needed to get off his chest. Being in a band he often found his songs turned out differently to how he originally intended. Rod Argent and Chris White were responsible for production, so they would have the final say. Now there was an element of freedom with no need for compromise. Consequently the songs are all short and simple, in contrast to the lengthy numbers with extended solos he'd become used to with Argent. On its release, Russ was pleasantly surprised and no doubt relieved to find that quite a few people, reviewers and record buyers, really liked it. The album apparently sold 5,000 copies within the first eight days of its release. Not chartbusting but

enough to suggest a healthy following, presumably including many faithful Argent supporters.

The album features ten songs, presumably written over a period of time and possibly before his departure from Argent. Side One kicks off with the punchy **She's a Hurricane**, with a bar room piano intro not unlike Chas n Dave. The lyrics have been finely crafted with some great lines about rockets running out of sky and mustangs with fuel starvation. It features a strong chorus coupled with a nice guitar solo, and is a contender for strongest song on the album, although that's not intended to suggest it's all downhill from here.

If there is a song that challenges for that position it surely has to be the next song **Loose Women**. The first line "Mary was the girl of my dreams, hair of blonde and stockings with seams" grabs the listeners' attention and goes on to describe a rather violent Crystal, the ritzy sports car driving Natalie, Sadie who ran away with his best friend and Candy the alcoholic who drowned. All this packed into under two and a half minutes and even time for a tasty sax solo and a killer chorus proclaiming that "Loose Women are gonna be the death of me". It's an infectious song and was chosen as the second single, an odd choice at the time, given that the prudish BBC were unlikely to approve of the title.

Russ' version of **I Don't Believe in Miracles** is next. Russ wrote this during his time with Argent and allegedly offered it to Colin Blunstone because he didn't feel Argent would want to use it. The band was understandably disappointed, although they played on the backing track as Blunstone took the single to a highest placing of No31 in the UK charts. It deserved a much higher position. I still prefer Russ Ballard's version. The lyrics seem to carry more conviction. Ironically this song also appeared on the live Argent LP that arrived around the same time, and was also covered later on by Barbara Dickson as well as the band America. It is surely one of the best, if not the best, song Russ has ever written.

**You Can Do Voodoo** is in the same vein as She's a Hurricane. This one has an astrological theme as would several future songs. I seem to recall Russ saying this was pretty much written on the fly, i.e. it was developed in the studio. I really like it. **You Can Count on Me** is one of those nice ballads that Russ is capable of writing. We saw this earlier with "Love" on Argent's Nexus LP and

later with Just a Dream Away and Treat Her Right from his solo catalogue. Musically beautiful and lyrically moving, for some reason these more gentle songs tend to be somewhat underrated or overlooked.

Side Two begins with first single **Fly Away**. At its time of release, I thought it was slightly weak despite the pleasant harmony vocals on the chorus. Its interesting that almost 43 years (ouch!) later, I appreciate and love this song more than I ever did in the past.

**Danger Zone Pts 1 and 2** were always favourites of mine from the moment I first heard them. Thanks to Stevie Wonder's Superstition I've always loved the sound of the Hohner Clavinet and to hear Russ using it on these two tracks blew me away.

I often wonder what a rock band could have made of **Kicks**. I'd love to hear a heavier interpretation of this song. I believe it has hidden potential. Lyrically it was very representative of the early to mid 70s when Hells Angels were to be feared and long before they cleaned up their act and started helping old ladies across the road. Some things do change for the better.

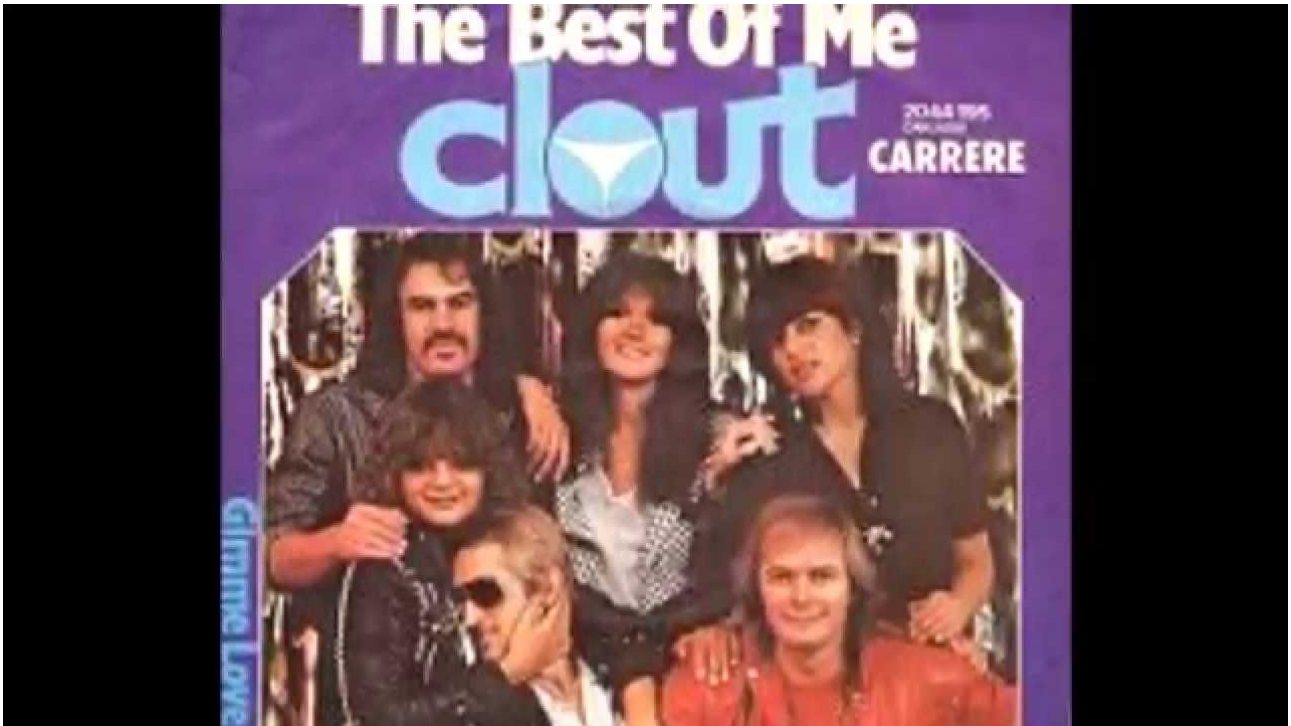
**Venus Shine Your Light** completes the list. It's another slow song and is catchy and memorable as it features some nice backing vocals. The album certainly showcases Russ' ability to cover different musical styles and his multi-instrumental talents. However, the overall result felt a little too lightweight. At the time I remember feeling slightly disappointed at the lack of punchier material along the lines of Chained, Liar, Thunder and Lightning and my personal favourite, Tragedy. I needn't have worried though, because Russ would go on to fulfil all my expectations, and then some, with his next release. There would be a year long wait in between whilst he took time out to produce Roger Daltrey's Ride a Rock Horse album. This project would prove to be a big stepping stone towards honing his studio skills as well as his ability to produce the work of other musicians.

Returning to my dilemma in the record store with two new LPs and only enough money to buy one, which did I choose? This one of course!

## RECORDED BY OTHERS

We could almost have a different version of this song every month. As mentioned by Russ, Clout was one of the first bands to cover Since You Been Gone in 1977. They were a South African, (almost) all girl group.

<https://youtu.be/UeU19p3jtzY>



## [CLOUT Since You've Been Gone](#)

[youtu.be](#)

Other than the 1979 Top 10 British hit for Rainbow, this earlier rendition of Russ Ballard's 'Since you've been gone' is the best known version. The mostly,b...