

RUSS BALLARD



NEWSLETTER



(Banner by Sven Kramer)

I have just had a look at the newsletter for last September. Russ was preparing for the Lisbon gig. Hard to believe it was a year ago!

Thank you once again for your feedback. Please keep it coming in. It is always good to hear from you. Contributions to the newsletter are always welcome...you know what they are...stories, questions, photos or just comments. If you have sent one already and we have used it, no problem, if you have another, please send it in.

Sue

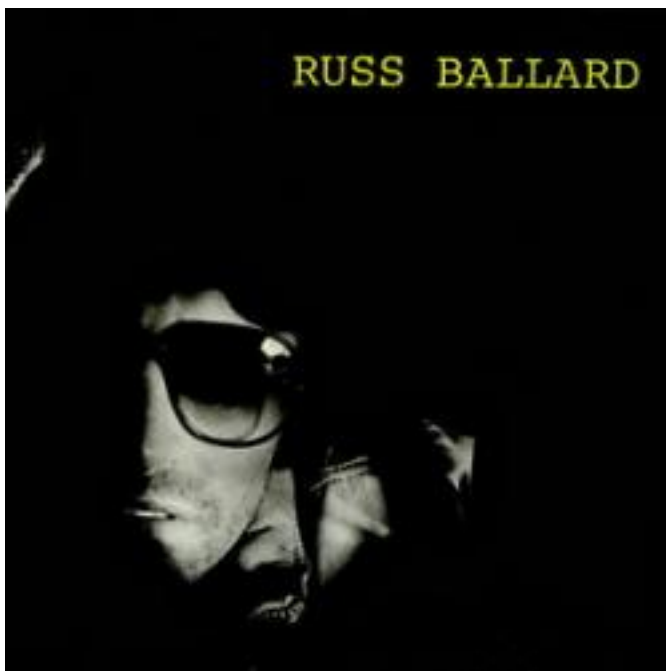
NEWS

Earlier this year Russ was asked to play at a private party at the end of August in Bremen, Germany.

Russ: *"Achim was to have celebrated his 50th birthday and he wanted me to play, because he used to love 'On The Rebound' and, his sister told me, they used to play the song all the time at the venue when they were in their early twenties....also, the same thing happened with 'Voices' a few years later. Apparently, AC/DC and Myself were Achim's favourite artists, so, the other group were an AC/DC tribute band."*

Many thanks to Bob Henrit, who has written another one of his brilliant journals for this event, giving us an insight into Russ's working life. You can read the full story below.

Have a look at Grande Rock ezine. This month Russ is featured in the "Hall of Fame". His self titled album of 1984 is reviewed with Russ's own comments about each track on the album.



The article by Thanos, says,

"There are some albums which have left their mark on rock music for good. Some albums which gave inspiration to thousands of musicians so as to play, write and record music for the first time. Some albums that must be included in every music lover's collection and deserve a place in the "Hall of Fame" of rock music.

"Such an album is Russ Ballard's homonymous release which came out in 1984. It is not to be mistaken with the other self-titled album which was released in 1975 though. **As Russ Ballard told me:** *"The original "Russ Ballard" album was on CBS. The '84 album was on EMI America... I didn't think much about the title dilemma at the time... I still call the EMI Record - The "Voices" album".*

"1984 was a time when music did rule the radio waves. Not fancy cover artworks, or album titles etc... just music, which was more important than everything else. Russ released an album which was meant to become a classic. You see the 80s was the time when the most rock/hard rock classic albums were released."

For the rest of this article, Russ's comments and videos of some of the tracks from the album, click on.....

<http://www.grande-rock.com/reviews/russ-ballard-russ-ballard>

THIS MONTH.....

Russ: *"Recently I've been working on some tunes for release on UMU. I listened to songs I have written over the last eighteen months and chose a couple for the launch on UMU. I overdubbed some new things, now I'm pleased with the result."*



(Photo by UMU Music)

Also, this past month I've been rehearsing for the Bremen show....it's great getting together with your mates to do gigs, a little like a three day holiday and quality time.

This Summer I've had a really good run of inspiration....in the studio between 5.00 - 6.00am. most days and written and recorded probably eight new tunes - You know, once I have a title that's inspiring, I'm usually flying.

I made some changes in the studio and I've mic'd up the room along with my big Marshall amp and cab. I've also taken some time to mic the drums and I can make my recordings sound more 'Live'....also, Bob's been around to do some overdubs for me."

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Russ: *"Embrace The Unknown [:That's Where The Growth is:]*

We don't grow from what we already know, but from what we've yet to know.....Yet, we're fearful of the unknown. I think it was M. Scott Peck, who wrote 'The Road Less Travelled' - He used the metaphor of the forest path, where everybody is walking...there's no growth! - in fact, it's dead, but if we stand on the path and look all around us, we see there's growth everywhere else....Ferns, Weeds, Foliage and bugs, a whole Universe! - I'll add a piece of my own here...."If we grow from the unknown....and, the ultimate unknown is death - Maybe death is the ultimate growth" - A bit heavy - eh!!

I love September....when it's sunny, the heat is so soft and you can lay in it all day without getting fried.

Peace and Love"

YOUR QUESTIONS

"My question is a two part .

Being a guitar player , I was curious when you are composing songs on the guitar , do you prefer acoustic or electric ? , or does the process vary?

Second part , being someone who has played and probably owns many guitars , do you have a favourite ?

Thanks"

Russ: *"I very seldom write songs on the guitar....it's usually piano....I have a technique of keeping time with the right hand, while making the left hand the rhythm, and to me the power chord part.*

Now I'm going to contradict what I've said, by saying, recently I'm writing more on the guitar and loving it - Guitar power chords can be very inspiring.

I like Fender Strats. and Gibson Les Pauls.....I think with those two you have most things covered [for rock]."

FROM BOB HENRIT

Achim Drzyska: ruhe in frieden

"Not too long after we returned from Tokyo in May, Russell called to say that a big Ballard fan in Bremen wanted to book him for a private party to celebrate his 50th birthday in August. Was I available? As it happened I didn't have any gigs on that bank-holiday weekend and nothing was written in heavy (or even light) pencil on the kitchen wall. So I was enthusiastically available - if selected. As it happened I could have had a bash at clearing the vegetable patch (really!) so naturally I was more than happy to do anything which would put off that particular chore for another week or two.

We'd need to rehearse of course just to remind ourselves about what we'd played in May, but no problem, this would give us a chance to get together and rack our memories round at Russell's place for quite a few cups of tea and a lot of laughs.

As time went by the real story behind the gig filtered through to Russell – Achim Drzyska (the birthday boy) was dying and this gig would be his swan song. This came as a shock to us but, since he'd already sent his 'wish list' of his favourite RGB songs that he wanted to hear played live, we were happy to do it anyway. We'd really give him a good send-off 'across the wide river' and into his next life.

The Chinese have an aphorism (or is it a proverb?) which says: "God laughs when he hears our plans" and after a few weeks even as we got on with our own lives a bombshell struck – Achim had died!

Now we musicians jokingly boast about being available to play at weddings, barmitvahs and funerals, but the thing is, outside of New Orleans, very few of us get to be involved in those last rites. (That said I did once go to a friend's mother's humanist funeral with Russell where they had a 'trad' jazz band and it was great fun and a completely joyous occasion.) However, unless I haven't been paying attention, not too many 'Rock' bands have got to play at those auspicious events.

But it transpired Achim's untimely death wasn't going to be the end of the gig. The Drzyska family still wanted Russell to play at what was now going to be a celebration of his life at the Aladin Theatre in the centre of Bremen.

We only had time for one rehearsal at RGB's on the day before we flew to Germany for the gig so we'd all done a serious amount of listening to the live recordings from previous gigs so once we did get together we'd all be reading from the same page. We weren't trying anything new other than

'You win again', 'Crack it' and 'New York groove' which we'd always done as a medley with 'She can do magic' and 'I know there's something going on' but never with new boy Stuart. So he needed to start from scratch. We all hugged, cheek-kissed one another and discussed children, grandchildren, football, life and the universe before getting on with the job in hand.

Everything went swimmingly and we stopped half-way through the set after 'Hope' for coffee and sandwiches – again courtesy of Deny. We chatted over lunch to Russell's now almost two year old granddaughter Elodie, who had grown a lot since we last saw her and was now a rather smiley person. She was carrying her own potty around, just in case!

In the fullness of time we went back across the lawn to the studio before wending our way through the rest of the songs beginning with 'Playing with fire', fortunately there were no 'train wrecks' and as far as the gig was concerned we were good to go. The guys were going straight for an Indian meal in Ware once we'd wrapped the rehearsal up and since the lovely Ricki was away at the UK leg of a wedding in Poole and Stewie and I were heading home to an empty house with do-it-yourself food - it made a lot of sense to tag along. This was a very wise decision because the food was sublime. I hadn't been to the Neelakash restaurant since we had an Argent get-together there with our wives so long ago I can't put a date to it. Things had changed there and my main problem was the food was so good at the Neelakash if I changed my allegiance to it, I'd find myself driving something like twenty miles instead of just around the corner to the always excellent Enfield Tandoori. And it was blindingly obvious they wouldn't do home-delivery to me in Enfield. But, when I inevitably decide to throw caution to the winds and go there, the Naga chicken will definitely be worth the trip.

Stuart and I were both driving back to my place so even though another Cobra and a swig of black Sambuca (which had miraculously appeared) was rather tempting, discretion proved to be the better part of valour and we decided against it. We arrived to an empty house as expected and talked drums over a small beer or two before starting the battle to produce the Lufthansa boarding-passes - first to Frankfurt then on to Bremen. Eventually after a struggle with what I think were 'pop ups' we finally managed it and Stewie bravely had his transferred to his phone. (I'm not confident enough this will work so I like to have a paper version which I can put into my pocket and search for frantically once I have to produce it at the airport.)

Steve and Stuart had a blues gig on the evening we were returning so they had to drive their gear to the venue, park Steve's van and hotfoot it back to the airport in Stuart's car. Not the easiest thing to do on any Friday, never mind on one with the last bank holiday of the year associated with it.

Stewie set-off before me but (hindsight is a dangerous thing!) it would have been better for me to have left before him. My journey to Russell's to join them and pick-up the car coincided with an inexplicable but possibly 'SWOT' induced traffic jam on the A10, which started my stomach churning thinking I'd be late. However all was well and before long Russell, Chris, me and Ryan were heading for Heathrow through the bank-holiday traffic chaos on the M25. As usual we hit bad Friday afternoon traffic around Rickmansworth but, that said it was obvious we were going to be held up somewhere. But Ryan was up to it and he dodged the other 14 million people on Britain's motorways so well we eventually found ourselves driving through the tunnel to Terminal One with time to spare. Because Russell and Chris had bags to check-in we headed straight to the Lufthansa

desks. Somehow we passed through security without anybody needing to see my passport and sat in the Servisair lounge drinking serve-yourself Gin and Tonics. Be very afraid!

Things have changed in the airline business and Lufthansa won't provide you with a flight to most places in Germany without making you pass slowly through Frankfurt's gigantic airport. Bremen, which of course was where we were eventually headed, was no different. This would necessitate a 'hurry up and wait' layover in Frankfurt before eventually taking another Airbus to Bremen. (There's a reason Music Agency people want you to travel with a 'proper' airline to gigs because if you miss a plane they'll immediately put you on another. Budget airlines will invariably argue the toss with you and if you inadvertently can't make a connection you may end up waiting uncomfortably in a terminal overnight before taking one of their flights the next day – and possibly pay again. More on this depressing subject later I'm afraid.)

There's not much to report about the flight except we five were dotted all over the plane and they didn't serve Gin and Tonic. I got on with reading the book I picked up in a hurry from the shelf as I rushed out of the door to drive too slowly to Russell's. It was called 'Tuesdays with Morrie' by a sports writer called Mitch Albom, which I'd read years before, and in the light of the 'ice-bucket challenge' - which was just gathering momentum - wanted to read it again. (The premise behind the ice water over the head challenge is to draw attention to a neurodegenerative disease known as ALS or Lou Gehrig's Disease with which the Morrie in the title is afflicted.) Every TV programme I watched in Germany seemed to eventually have someone getting a bucket of really cold water with cubes of ice in it poured over their heads. Unfortunately no one mentioned there was a message behind this, what it had to do with Motor Neurone disease, or even what was going on. It's a thought provoking book which I passed on to Russell once I'd finished it after the Frankfurt/Bremen leg of the flight.

We were picked up at Bremen's City airport close to where the old Focke-Wulf aircraft factory used to be. This put me in mind of the "those Fockes were Messerschmitts" joke. We were driven just 15 kilometres to the Atlantic Hotel which, we discovered the next morning at breakfast, was right alongside a horse-racing track with a golf driving range, a chipping area and a putting green all within the middle of its racing circuit. They'd over-catered and laid on a cold supper for 10 people which we were grateful for, we were also pleased it came with some equally cold dark beer.

At 12.30 (their time) we were more than ready for bed.

We were all up on the stroke of 9 for breakfast (except for Stewie who simply doesn't do it) and sat there chatting happily, as we do, for an hour or so. Stevie Smith, Stewie and I went down early to the Aladin Music Hall in the old Tivoli Theatre which was decorated inside in a faux-Oriental style and looked very familiar to me. From a previous life perhaps. We three were there early to check out our gear and Russell and Chris arrived a little later after we'd wrestled our equipment into submission without anybody seeing our frustration. As it happened that wasn't true for me - my drum kit looked and sounded great. It was a black-lacquered Yamaha 9000 which for once wasn't fitted with the usual Pinstripes which always characterised its sound. This set had Emperor drum heads which gave a zingy 'rock' edge to their sound which really surprised me. The snare was a brass, or was it a copper one which cut through beautifully. Cymbals were Zildjian 'A Customs' which I'd never played a gig with before and I soon discovered there was no problem with them at

all. The only fly in the ointment was the hi hat pedal which unfortunately decided to stop going up and down during the set.

Soon we were ready for the sound-check which certainly didn't go to plan, but then to be scrupulously honest, neither did the gig. More of this later.

The check itself became protracted and arguably a waste of time because RGB had problems from a hum on his Marshall stack which couldn't be traced and fixed for an hour. This put paid to any kind of useful run-through of songs. Everything was checked and swapped-out including effects pedals, tuners, amplifiers and even guitars. Naively the only link in the chain which wasn't checked until much later was the guitar lead and guess what...? This impacted on the time available so having been approached by 'Hells Bells' (the AC/DC tribute band) who were on first we gave in and let them take over.

They repaid our kindness by taking all the available beer onto the stage with them and drinking it – happily saying it was necessary for their show!

Anyhow we were as prepared as we could be with the time available, which was nowhere near as much as we would have liked. We returned in reasonable spirits to the hotel for supper which was surprisingly good for Russell - they had a proper vegan menu! He had aubergine something or other while the rest of us had to make do with rump steak and chips. Bummer! Sascha Gerbig, the tour manager joined us to eat and since we hadn't seen him for almost a year we lost no time in catching up with what he'd been up to since then and how his family were getting along. So, I hear you asking, what about the gig?

Well it's like this, in an attempt to be really friendly and helpful to the support band we'd broken all the rules. We'd not only allowed them to move my drum riser back, we'd allowed them to take my microphones off to put them on their drums. It was a huge mistake and we knew from bitter experience this unheard of act of kindness would end in tears. It negated the problematic sound-check we'd had earlier because we really needed to start again – certainly as far as the drums were concerned. To be completely honest (for once?) we never did get back to square-one because instead of setting their drums up in front of ours as agreed they'd brought in a socking great drum riser of their own which needed to be dismantled and cleared before anything could happen. And, to make matters worse the AC/DC tributers decided (erroneously) they were going down so well the audience were demanding a few encores. Not to worry though as soon as they'd struck the last chord of what I assume was 'Back in Black' and the feverish work began to set us up, they put the thumping dance music on. This set the scene for us perfectly. Not! Don't get me started. Eventually it became so late it was a question of 'sh*t or get off the pot' there was nothing else for it, we had to get out onto that stage, warts and all. Unfortunately the gear was in such disarray that in hindsight we should have kept the audience waiting.

As highly-experienced troupers we felt we could rise above all these petty problems but it was a close run thing. We confidently went into the first song, which was 'René didn't do it' and were momentarily stunned by the sound on stage. It could only accurately be described as dreadful, with the F-word in front of it! It was impossible to pick your way through the noise we were inadvertently producing. We ploughed through that song and against all odds managed to finish together without being able to hear any musical clues. We all privately thought that as time went

by, Torbin, who was in sole charge of the sound, would have wrestled it into submission. The desk he was in charge of was a digital one with a memory to remember all the patches which had been laboriously set-up during that afternoon's protracted 'sound battle'. For some reason the desk didn't seem to have remembered them (not from the racket we were being forced to listen to). Maybe he hadn't pressed 'save' after our afternoon's sound-check?

Well there was nothing we could do to change anything because by now we were in full-flow with the show. There was no time to ask and no way to get a message to him to do anything with the mix in the monitors. I for one wouldn't have any idea where to start. I couldn't hear Russell's lead guitar at all while Chris' rhythm guitar was deafening – had they somehow been switched? I could hear my drums at source but wasn't in any of the monitors, including my own.

I hadn't had a chance, or didn't dare to look at the audience, but once I threw caution to the winds I was able to ascertain they seemed to be content enough - dancing happily, singing along happily and drinking happily. They, like Torbin and most other people around the stage, were seemingly oblivious to our plight. We soldiered on through four songs until we got to 'Hope' where we hoped (pun intended) since it wasn't an out-and-out rock song, we'd be able to sort something out. Unfortunately this wasn't to be and we weren't going to be rescued from our predicament. (Make that our nightmare!)

The songs came thick and fast (not literally fast because we at least had control over tempos) and it was amusing to see the party-goers in the pit in front of the stage struggling to dance to 'Hold your head up'. This was something we'd witnessed from the stage with Argent 42 years earlier. (There are those who say if you could have danced to it the record would have been even more successful!) Eventually we got to 'God gave rock and roll to you' where the audience were encouraged to join in although not it must be said with as much conviction as they do at an RGB, or even an Argent gig. However it seemed they'd been biding their time and as soon as we got around to 'Voices' and 'On the rebound' (Achim's favourites) they were really up for it. The sound hadn't really got any better but since we were on the home lap we weren't paying too much attention to it - not until Russell's guitar stopped working. We all knew there was a problem but unfortunately, as with the overall sound, nobody seemed to be able to do anything about it. The only person who spotted anything was Sascha who somehow fixed it. (All the guitarists were using those new Korg tuners which sit on top of the amplifier and at the flick of a foot-switch will tell you whether you're in tune. It's a clever idea but one has to wonder whether simply introducing them into the circuit was giving rise to the problems Russell had been experiencing all day? Strangely there were only problems with the Fender guitars not the Les Pauls which everyone knows is fitted with humbucker, ie twin pole pickups.)

Eventually we'd worked our way down the set list to 'Little Queenie' which gave the mourners a chance to shake their booty.

Russell spoke about Achim from time to time during the show and amongst other things mentioned how, since he'd sadly died on the 25th June, as a football fan he'd only just missed Germany lifting the Jules Rimet trophy in Brazil!

Eventually the show was over and even though it arguably wasn't as good as we would have liked it to be, due to circumstances beyond our control - at least we had all played a gig together. And

one we weren't expecting to play when we returned from Japan. We were getting our breath back in the dressing-room when Achim's sister Saskia came in with her husband to thank Russell profusely for his efforts. So it turned out he certainly had managed to touch Achim's family - this made all the onstage problems fade into insignificance.

As Morrie says in the 'Tuesdays' book:

"Death ends a life not a relationship."

That said it remains the most problematic gig we've ever done and none of us would want to experience a worse one. But, because of its raison d'être it was a very satisfying one from a spiritual standpoint.

We headed back to the Atlantic hotel 'am der Galopennbahn' to lick our wounds and perhaps just one last glass of that intoxicating dark beer. Having had our passports and Boarding Passes returned by Sascha some of us were ready for bed. It was well after 2 am their time – Rock and Roll!

I was awake for breakfast at nine o'clock as were RGB, Chris and Steve although still no Stewie. Russell had evidently been up long before and was wandering around the race course around 7.30. To be honest it wasn't the best breakfast I'd ever had in Germany but there was a slightly less salubrious version of Birchteser muesli available which I helped myself to and spiced-up with fruit salad, grapes and some delicious Forest honey. You squirted this out of a clever machine onto your plate, providing you held it in just the right position. Fortunately there was as usual an elegant sufficiency of coffee flowing which kept us talking for a couple of hours until it was time to shower, checkout of the hotel and head for the airport.

The airport wasn't busy and we checked in for the Frankfurt flight in record time - while Stewie had breakfast. We were early and waited 'airside' for quite some time chatting and laughing but unfortunately not drinking anything. The courtesy lounge was evidently in another terminal and we would have had to retrace our steps with difficulty through immigration and security to get to a gin and tonic. We decided against it and sat next to gate Z in terminal three waiting for our flight to be called. Unfortunately as we were sitting obliviously an announcement came that "due to a late arrival of the incoming transport, our plane to Frankfurt would be delayed by 45 minutes".

Consternation set in because we had a connecting plane to catch so I walked to the desk to ask the big question, what would happen if we didn't arrive in time? I was advised that no problem Lufthansa would hold the London-bound plane up until we got there! Now, call me sceptical but, I've been travelling on planes for 52 years now so I know that's never happened for me before, but for some reason I was sucked into the story.

Eventually the Airbus took-off well over an hour late, and we headed south to Frankfurt. We'd been given a gate number for the London flight and on arrival we ran straight to that gate to discover we'd been rebooked onto another which departed more than an hour later! We knew the plane hadn't left when we received this news but they certainly weren't letting us on it. Lufthansa had sold me a bum steer!

Quite some time later the second Airbus took off for home with us dotted all over the place. They still couldn't offer us a Gin and Tonic and I'm beginning to wonder what Lufthansa have got against our national drink?

I wasn't too inconvenienced by the delay because all I had to do was jump into Ryan's car and head back to Russell's to pick-up the Rav4 which you'll no doubt remember I parked there on the Friday afternoon. But Stewie and Steve were sailing close to the wind because they had to get to that hotel car park at Fleet in Hampshire and set up their gear in time for a 9.30 downbeat. We'd certainly had our unfair share of trials and tribulations over the last few days, but we'd all enjoyed each other's company and ultimately triumphed over difficulty.

As Nelson Mandela tells it like it is in his eulogy in Russell and Chris' world Cup theme song, 'Hope':
"The generosity of the human spirit can overcome all adversity....."

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