



(Banner by Sven Kramer)

Lots for you this month. We have the interview Russ did in the summer for The Hustle. It is a really good interview, as always, well worth listening to. It is fairly long - 1h 38min - so settle down with it when you have a bit of time or have it on in the background while you are doing something else.

Dave Williams has written an excellent review of Russ's album 'Winning' for his 'History' series.

Then we have a new feature. Dave thought it would be good to get to know other members of this newsletter community by having 'Readers Profiles'. So I asked him to start us off! It's good to get to know Dave better. Now we need to get to know more of you. Please tell us about yourself. You can use Dave's profile as a guide and answer the same questions or you can do your own thing. I will put them into the newsletter in the order in which they come in so, if you would like to feature in next month's, get writing very soon. (I won't have internet access at some points coming up so you might not get an immediate reply from me).

Sue

NEWS



Coming soon....Russ is having a new website built by our very own Sven Kramer. It is almost ready to go live so keep a look out for it. Let us know what you think.

THIS MONTH

Russ: "I appeared on Old Grey Whistle test in 1975 and on that occasion I had a backing group of new friends, mainly from the Midlands, at that time Alan Wicket was the drummer...We lost touch but not until after he'd played on recording sessions with me. One song we recorded was a song I wrote called 'So You Win

Again'. It was eventually recorded by Hot Chocolate and reached number one. It was good to hear Alan's voice when he phoned me some weeks ago and wanted me to listen to some recordings he'd made with a singer from the U.S. called Becki Brindle. Becki is a blues influenced artist who plays really good guitar, however, she has other influences, which give her an original 'feel'. To cut to the chase, Alan asked if I'd listen to some live recordings they'd made of Becki's songs. They came through the post on CD...I listened to them straight away and I phoned him to say they were great and made some suggestions on arrangements. Then Alan asked if I had a song they could record. I said I had a blues influenced song and I would send it to them. Alan phoned a few days later to say he liked the song and asked if I'd record it with them....So, we're getting together in a few weeks to record it.....I'll let you know how the session goes."

INTERVIEW

An interview Russ did during the summer with Jon Lamoreaux for the Hustle, an American Podcast.

<http://thehustle.podbean.com/e/episode-121-russ-ballard/>

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[- Russ Ballard](#)
thehustle.podbean.com

Russ Ballard is one of the most successful songwriters of the rock era. Artists from Ace Frehley to America have scored with tunes written by the man. Russ has also ...

LETTERS

Hello Sue,

I think some months ago I mentioned the German version of NYG. Coincidentally, I found this on YouTube: Komm mit auf den Hinterhof (und wir tanzen den New

York Groove). Translated: Come to the backyard, we'll dance the New York Groove :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQs9rrtlpMA>

To your understanding, it was quite usual in the 70ies to publish a German version of a successful pop song. For instance some 41 years ago, Jürgen Drews peaked Nr. 1 in Germany with „Ein Bett im Kornfeld“, while the Bellamy Brothers reached Nr. 2.

However, Buck & Sylvie were quite unknown and I don't know anything about them.

Best wishes from Germany

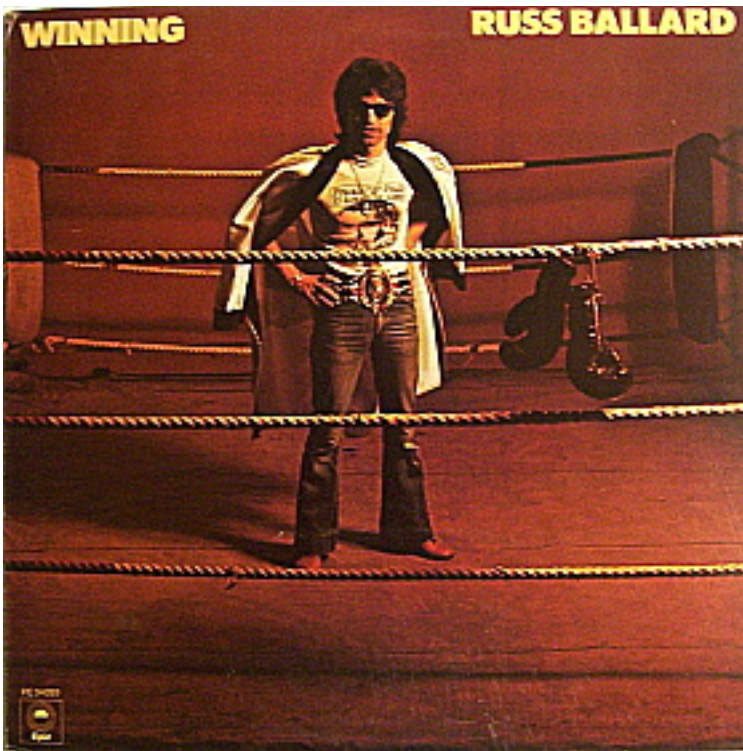
Markus

PS: And of course I remember summer 77 when So You Win Again ran Nr.1 in UK!

RUSS'S MUSIC HISTORY

By Dave Williams

The third instalment looking back over the years of Russ' solo career takes us to 1976 and the release of the album "**Winning**". Whilst we didn't know it at the time, this album would provide a magical piece of inspiration that would prove significant. Read on...



Russ Ballard – Winning (1976) Epic Records S EPC 69210

February 1976 saw the release of Russ Ballard's second solo album "**Winning**". Having written and played almost every instrument on his first release, this time Russ felt that he needed an outside pair of ears, someone who was not involved in the playing and could therefore be objective. Muff Winwood fitted the bill and, just as importantly he wanted to do it. Rhett Davies was hired as studio engineer. Other artists who benefited from Rhett's skills include Roxy Music, Talking Heads and Genesis.

With Russ restricting himself to guitar and keyboards, various session musicians were required. Dave Mattacks, best known for his work with Fairport Convention, was brought in on drums with Dave Markee on bass guitar. Dave Markee worked with The Rolling Stones, Frank Zappa, The Who and Bing Crosby and later became Eric Clapton's bass player from 1979 to 1982. Saxophonist Nick Newall previously worked with Mike Cotton Sound and has featured on several albums by The Kinks. He also played on Roger Daltrey's Ride a Rock Horse album which was featured in the last newsletter. Also on saxophones were Chris Mercer and Pete Zorn. Chris Mercer played Alto Sax on the T Rex hit Metal Guru and Tenor Sax on Stealer's Wheel's Stuck in the Middle with You, Gerry Rafferty's band. Multi-instrumentalist Zorn, worked with Richard Thompson, Steeleye Span and he too recorded with Gerry Rafferty. I should point out that Pete was not the saxophonist on Baker Street (and neither was Bob Holness of Blockbusters fame,

which we now know is an urban myth!!). As a digression, the late Raphael Ravenscroft was the sax player on that song, earning £27 for his efforts.

Other notable session musicians on *Winning* included John "Rabbit" Bundrick on piano and former Jimmy James & The Vagabonds guitarist Pip Williams. A quartet of female vocalists included Liza Strike and American vocalist Madeline Bell, well known in the UK as lead singer of Blue Mink. The recording sessions took place at Island Studios, London in 1975.

A few words about the record sleeve. This was conceived by London photographer Graham Hughes, who also created sleeves for Roger Daltrey's *Ride a Rock Horse*, Roxy Music's *Siren* and Robert Palmer's *Pressure Drop* albums. His idea for **Winning** was to photograph Russ in a boxing ring kitted out with boxing gloves and cape. But with a title like *Winning*, Graham felt the photograph needed something more. If only he could borrow the Lonsdale Belt! So, that's exactly what he did. It was no simple task. Initially the British Board of Boxing flatly refused, but money talks. On raising £2000 in cash as security, collected at short notice from a variety of sources, Hughes secured the loan of boxing's most coveted prize for a weekend. However, once he got his hands on it he was terrified of losing it. By the time he returned it on Monday morning he was "sick of the sight of it" according to journalist James Wynn who ran a story at the time. The sleeve appeared in the usual musical papers promoting the record as *"Another milestone musical for Russ Ballard"*. I'm sure what they meant to say was *"Another musical milestone for Russ Ballard"* but as it's taken me 40 years to spot the error, I guess they probably got away with it.

Onto the music. There are ten songs, five per side. The opening title track **Winning** is immediately striking. *"One day I was on the ground, when I needed a hand and it couldn't be found. I was so far down that I couldn't get up, you know one day I was one of life's losers"*. These lines paint a scary picture, but out of despair comes triumph and this is the basis of the song. It focuses on the joy of emerging from a bad situation and a determination to avoid returning to old ways. It could apply to a multitude of real life situations. Russ now talks quite openly about the period of depression that he went through in the early 70s, and though we didn't know it at the time, this song was no doubt drawn from personal experience. *"I'm Winning and I don't intend losing again."*

I've mentioned previously that Russ often writes around astrological themes, and with Scorpio and Gemini references so it is with the second track **Born on Halloween**, and being born on 31st October who can blame him for using this as

lyrical inspiration? It's a catchy song, very much in line with some of the material from the first album. The next track, **A Song for Gail** was inspired by a programme Russ saw on TV that told the story of a teenage girl's downfall. It's convincingly sung and questions how the warning signs were missed or ignored and tragedy could happen. Back in 1976 when Russ briefly toured, he included this in his set and played it on electric piano.

Fakin' Love is a lively song, similar in feel to Disco Stomp by Hamilton Bohannon and Russ' own New York Groove and features an excellent sax solo. The final chorus leads into a sequence of descending chords gradually slowing down to a stop as if a train pulling into a station. But there's no time to jump off because almost straight away the opening piano chords start the final track of side one, and what a gem. From the first listen I knew I was hearing something very special. It had all the ingredients of a hit record. The melody, the lyrics, the memorable chorus, not too long, not too short, everything perfect. It was the obvious choice as a single and when it was released as the first single off the album I was so certain of it being a hit I would have bet my house on it. The BBC thought so too, with it featured as Record of the Week by more than one of their DJs as I recall, and it was positioned on the main playlist. Thankfully I'm not a betting man. Despite several music papers awarding it 5 stars, it didn't make it. The song I'm referring to of course is **Since You Been Gone**. I'm not sure how it fared in other parts of the world but it was soon picked up by several other artists, most notably by the Currie sisters and Head East in America and Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow in the UK. This latter version was a massive hit and history was made. I still argue and maintain that the original version is superior.

Side Two begins with **Just a Dream Away** featuring the afore mentioned Rabbit on piano. It's a wonderfully laid back dreamy number, deserving of being selected as the second single release. It didn't quite have the same hit potential as Since You Been Gone, but it exhibited another side of Russ's music. My recollection is that it didn't gain the same level of airplay and subsequently failed to make the charts. **Here I Am** is a song about holding out a hand to the lonely. Aimed at the vulnerable, it's beautifully crafted with great vocal and string arrangements and a nice sax solo that takes the song to an early fade out. Raising the tempo is third track **Free at Last**. It follows the theme of breaking free from negativity of the past and moving forward. The next song is another of my personal favourites. Maybe this could have made a quirky single. **Are You Cuckoo?** is possibly one of the catchiest songs Russ has ever recorded. There's a synth bass line that is reminiscent of Stevie Wonder's funkier period. The melody features lots of piano accompanied by punchy brass and lots of backing vocals.

The icing on the cake is a trademark guitar solo from Russ himself. The final track is a song that describes the monotony of toiling from Monday to Friday and the relief as Friday approaches. **Weekend** was featured in the live set on the UK dates in 1976 and many will recall that this was the finale of their Radio One In Concert appearance that year. Sadly, it was faded out as the famous pips heralded the 7 O'clock news bulletin.

Whilst not achieving chart status, **Winning** was pivotal in boosting Russ' reputation as a solo artist and particularly as a songwriter. The songs on the album are painstakingly arranged and well produced, credit to Muff Winwood and the talented arrangers among the session players. The lyrical content has been given as much attention as the musical content with no resorting to familiar clichés that sometimes crop up repeatedly. Personally, it is my favourite Russ Ballard album. Whilst there are undoubtedly stronger songs scattered across his catalogue, as a collection I find the songs are cohesive, enjoyable and consistent.

To tie in with the release of **Winning**, Russ put together a band with the intention of touring. Consisting of Bill Roberts on guitar, Wally Wilson on keyboards, Tony Lester on bass and Al Wickett on drums they played some concerts in America and a couple in the UK plus the appearance on 'Radio One in Concert' at the Paris Theatre in London. An Autumn tour was due to follow but never happened and it would be 40 years before he eventually toured the UK under his own name. The Winning album is best summed up by one of the reviews in the music papers at the time of release. Bear in mind this was at a time when these writers could be pretentious, brutal and cruel. Awarding it the maximum 5 stars, journalist Barbara Charone wrote *"Quite simply, Winning is a bitch of a rock album. Of the ten tracks seven are genuine grade A rockers reeking of an infectious glory"* High praise indeed! In 1976 AC/DC were still in their formative period so Barbara's reference to "rock" should be treated with caution. Russ would turn rockier later with Barnet Dogs, but **Winning** is probably more accurately described, at least by those of us who witnessed its original release, as a collection of very solid pop songs with a feel-good factor.

READERS LIVES

Dave Williams

I foolishly suggested that it would be nice to know a little bit about fellow newsletter readers. I suggested that we could introduce a different reader every

issue, giving them a platform to speak about themselves. The idea was accepted on the basis that I go first. I hadn't anticipated that, but fair enough, here goes...

A bit about yourself: I live and work in the UK, in the Midlands. As I was growing up I wanted to be a Meteorologist, but the school careers advisor suggested that it would be a low paid job. I wasn't intending to be a TV weatherman like Michael Fish or Bill Giles, I was more interested in weather research. I took his advice and continued with my science based subjects eventually ending up in the chemicals industry. Outside of school I always wanted to play drums from 8 years old. My Dad took me to a circus and all I watched was the drums through the show. My parents wouldn't hear of the idea. Instead I was subjected to piano lessons from age 8 to 12 until the teacher told my parents they were wasting their money. I was playing without reading the music. Truth was that I was bored playing Mozart, Bach and scales. Only later did I realise that the theory side was invaluable. My interest in drums waned and at the very late age of 25 years old I joined a band as vocalist, progressing to keyboards and bass guitar in local bands, which I've continued with to this day. Primarily playing covers, it's been, and continues to be, a total pleasure. Clubs, pubs, weddings, corporate events, and occasionally prisons, hospitals and air force bases, every gig is different. I would never profess to being good enough to go professional but it's a road that many of today's manufactured bands haven't travelled, which is unfortunate because it's a great education, especially with regards to handling different audiences. As for a career in meteorology, no regrets. British weather is not as varied and interesting as it used to be in my opinion, though global warming suggests this could change dramatically in the years to come.

What are your earliest memories of music? I first started to pay attention to music in the early 60s hearing hits by The Beatles, Manfred Mann, The Troggs, etc. on my parents' "wireless". The radio would be playing in the kitchen whilst my Mum was wrestling with the washing machine and mangle. Foolishly she allowed me to play their records on the "radiogram" and I was fascinated by those 78rpm records, many of which I managed to break. There were also some 45rpm records, one of which was **The Roulettes'** cover of **Stubborn Kind of Fellow**. Years later I found that Russ was their guitarist and indeed the B side, Mebody was composed by Henrit / Ballard. A few years ago, I mentioned this to Bob Henrit and, whilst trying to suppress a smile, he informed me that he was the songwriting expert back then and passed his knowledge onto Russ. Good old Bob. On TV I remember watching Juke Box Jury on TV hosted by David Jacobs. I

was a little too young to have witnessed Elvis' arrival but I can imagine the excitement it created.

<https://youtu.be/RhGwgEUIXEO>



What type of music appealed to you in your formative years? Initially the British pop bands including those mentioned earlier. I increasingly got into Tamla Motown music, with a passion for songs written by Holland-Dozier-Holland which holds strong today. You think of The Supremes and associate them with Baby Love and Where Did Our Love Go, but equally enjoyable were The Happening and Reflections.

What was the first record you ever bought? Ball of Confusion by The Temptations. Tamla Motown of course. Like most towns and cities, we had many record shops but there was one called Felix's, that specialised in singles rather than albums, and I'm sure my pocket money greatly subsidised their mortgage. Ironically, I later befriended Rare Earth guitarist Ray Monette on Facebook only to discover that he played session guitar on this track and many of the other Motown records I bought over the years.

When did you first become aware of Russ Ballard's music? There was a lot of snobbery around in the early 70s. Snobbery might not be the right word, but you were expected to like either soul music or rock music. I liked both. I don't see those boundaries. My awakening to rock music came with the arrival of Machine Head by Deep Purple. Since then I've expanded my record collection with most genres imaginable. Harry Chapin to Jah Wobble, Howard Jones to Johnny Guitar Watson. If I like it I buy it. Some of the Prog Rock like Yes and King Crimson was a little too complex for me. I tried so hard to like Yes but I couldn't. Having said that Rick Wakeman's Six Wives of Henry VIII album and the Yes album 90125, which featured Owner of a Lonely Heart are both brilliant. I quite liked Argent's Hold Your Head Up, but when I heard the follow up Tragedy, I was totally sold on the band. Only later did I realise that I'd already latched onto Russ

Ballard's writing ability through buying Barry Ryan's Can't Let You Go and Capability Brown's version of Liar.

Your best Russ Ballard moment? May 8th, 1976. I never managed to see Argent until after Russ had left. I did get to see him at St Albans at the beginning of the very hot Summer of 1976. He played a couple of gigs with his own band after leaving Argent and, courtesy of the late great Fred Wilkinson, I was invited backstage to say hello to my hero. Russ gave me a warm welcome, and that wasn't just the weather. He was hosting an after-gig party and his family were lovely. They say you should never meet your heroes, but I'm so glad I made that journey. Russ was a true gentleman that evening and remains so today. What made it more special was the fact that, had I chosen not to travel to that gig, there wouldn't be another opportunity to attend a solo band gig until 2016. That's a whole forty years, by which time lots of hair had fallen out, unfortunately mine not Russ's!!

Favourite Russ album? For me its **Winning**. Lots of uptempo, feel good songs. As a total piece of work, I really love this album. Of course, we all know that all of Russ' albums are high quality so it's a fine line. I must say that **The Seer** is high on my list for similar reasons.

Recent experiences: I attended the Childline charity concert at O2 in 2007 where Russ joined The Zombies to play Hold Your Head Up. I could see that Russ, Rod and Jim Rodford were getting a real buzz from playing together again. This led to two Argent mini reunion tours. I attended a few of these gigs and harboured a fantasy that Argent might get together and write and record a new album but sadly it appears unlikely. I can only dream about what might come about, especially as Chris White is still very involved in music. I also went to the "evening with" event in London. That was a fantastic evening and it's frustrating that this has not been made available yet. I would buy the DVD without hesitation.

For the future: I absolutely love the latest album **It's Good To Be Here**. It's got a real kick to it. So many great songs. **Time Machine** initially gained a lot of attention, fully justified as it's an infectious song. I particularly love **The First Man That Ever Danced** and **Free From Your Hold** if only for their killer chorus. I hope that the 2016 tour gave Russ sufficient enjoyment to encourage another UK tour soon, not forgetting his amazing fans in Europe, America and Japan who gave him such a massive reception when he toured there.

RECORDED BY OTHERS

We had this one in the newsletter 18 months ago but, following Dave's review of Winning, it seemed appropriate to have it again.

<https://youtu.be/0FmPg4lrBKc>

	Santana - Winning youtu.be Music video by Santana performing Winning. (C) 1980 Sony Music Entertainment
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