



(Banner by Sven Kramer)

We have more new readers this month. Welcome to you all. Some are via the website and others just found us otherwise. Please feel free to join in and make a contribution. We would love to hear from you.

We are aware that many of you are waiting for a date for the get together so that you can book holidays, book flights to get here etc. I can assure you that the arrangements are well in hand. Russ is looking at venues and it is just a case of coordinating everything to get a date when it can all happen. I have put the emails of everyone who has expressed an interest...that they will definitely be there or they will if the date is good...into a separate contact list so emails about arrangements will go straight to them without waiting for the newsletter. If anyone would like to be there but hasn't contacted me, please do so and I will add you to the list. Many thanks to those who have offered help with venues, equipment etc.

This month we have another great article from Dave Williams...**Into The Fire**. Having read Dave's article I realised that I don't have it on CD!!! It is on order now!

Now, quite a few people have said that they like the 'Readers' Lives' idea and will send in their profile. However, we don't have one for this month. A lot of our original readers sent in their 'Stories' but we now have many more readers so please don't think you can't do it again. Don't think your life isn't interesting enough to do it; all lives are interesting and we just want to know a little bit about you.

Have a fabulous new year. Hopefully a year when we will meet in person.

Sue

## THIS MONTH

Russ: *"Happy New Year to one and all....I hope its going well so far.*

*I can't remember if I'd mentioned to you that I'd met with the UK President of BMG Publishing, with the view that the company would support my album project and release the CD. Also, it was suggested, because I started my memoirs a few years ago, I should talk with the head of Penguin/Random House Publishing....BMG own Random House and it's thought that having an autobiography would naturally help sell the music because I would have two outlets for the music to be heard....that's Music Radio and Talk Radio. I felt happy with the meeting and promised to stay in touch. So, it came as a big surprise to learn, the week before Christmas, Alexi Cory Smith [The UK President] , announced she had resigned from the company after seven great years....Sadly, I now have to start negotiations with a new head of BMG, which will put my plans back a bit. I'll keep you updated on any developments.*

*We had a funny Christmas day and evening in the Ballard household. Someone had arranged drinking games...games like picking up Weetabix packets from the kitchen floor....but without touching the pack with the hand, only with the teeth....I know it doesn't sound that funny, but after some wine it gets hilarious ....Also, the old party trick of standing around a piano and singing songs....White Christmas, Over The Rainbow etc...*

*My great son, Christian, has finished his writing/production with Alex Hepburn. Take a listen, it's out this month....She is brilliant - an amazing voice and Christian's production and mixing is the best.*

*Oh well, have a Great month and I'll see you in February....*

*Loads of Love,  
Russ x "*

## LETTERS

From Gordon Dickson

Hi Sue ,

Just thought you and others might be interested . New York Groove written by Russ , a hit for Hello in 1975 and then Ace Frehley of Kiss in 1978, was featured in The Blacklist shown on Sky , at the start of the first episode of the new season which premiered on Tuesday 2nd Jan. It was the Ace version which was used.

Russ should be proud that a song he wrote back in 1975 , 43 years ago, is still used in a prime time TV show in 2018 . How many of today's so called music stars could match that ?

Gordon

## RUSS'S MUSIC HISTORY

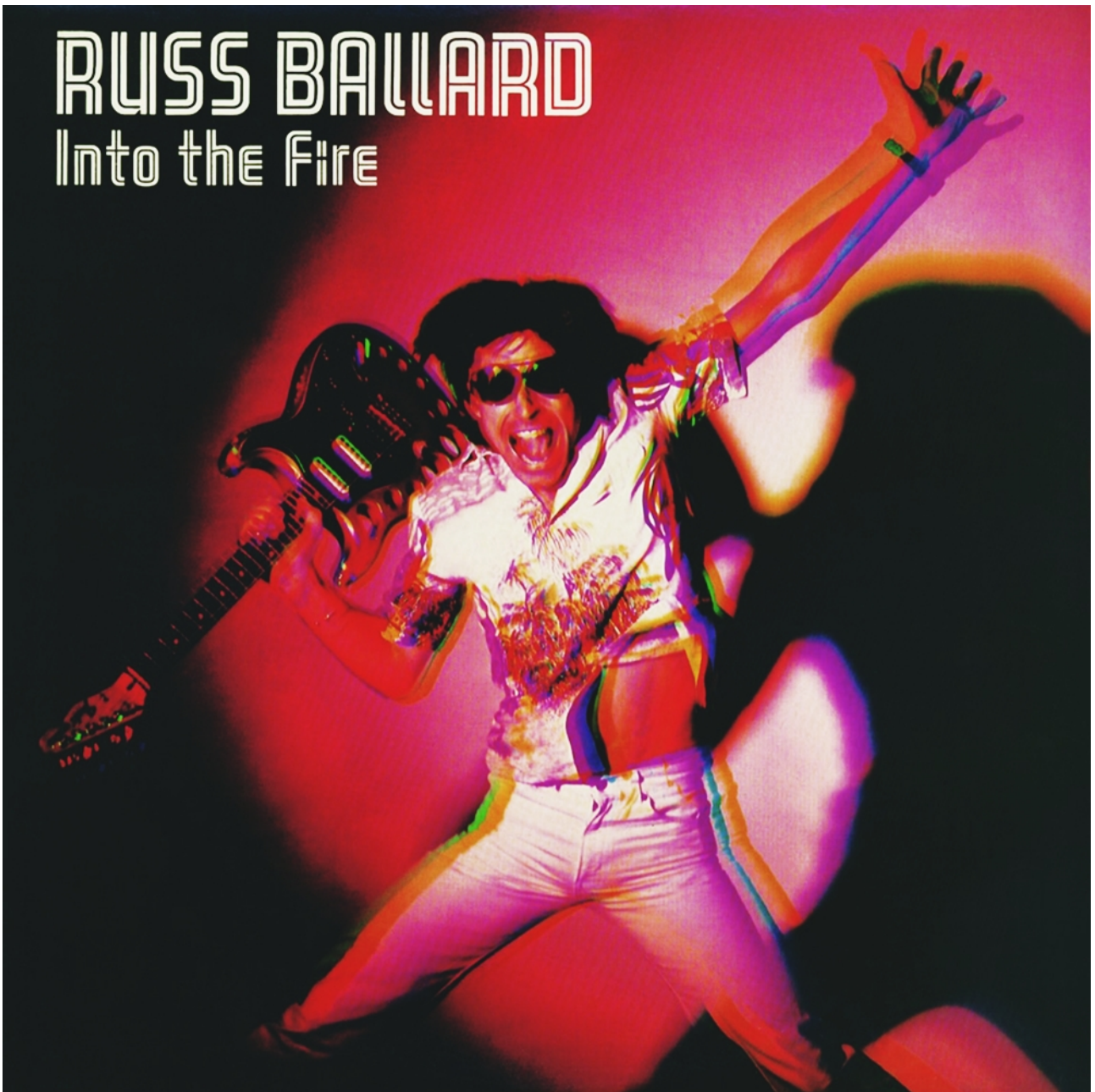
By Dave Williams

### Into the Fire

Arriving hot on the heels of the album **Barnet Dogs**, reviewed last month, Russ's next LP, **Into the Fire**, was a milestone in that it represented the fifth and final album of original material to be released by Russ on Epic Records. Though we didn't know it at the time, its release would bring to an end a 10-year association with the CBS owned label dating back to the release of Argent's **Ring of Hands** album.

# RUSS BALLARD

## Into the Fire



### **Russ Ballard & The Barnet Dogs – Into the Fire (1981) Epic Records S EPC 84806**

Once again co-produced by Russ and John Stanley, UK fans, at least, would be forgiven for believing this was the follow-up to **At the Third Stroke**, because, to the best of my knowledge, the **Barnet Dogs** LP was not officially released on his

home soil. It may or may not have been released in parts of Europe but it was certainly released in the States, where it achieved sufficient sales to provide a placing in the Billboard Top 200 LP charts. The obvious question would be whether or not Russ, having achieved some long overdue chart recognition as a recording artist, would continue along the same 'heavier' musical path. A glance at the record sleeve confirms that the same line-up was used. Interestingly, the rear of the sleeve, its spine, the insert lyric sheet all credit the release as Russ Ballard and the Barnett Dogs. Russ was, this time, listed as playing keyboards as well as guitar, Bill Roberts may also have played guitar, although he is only credited as providing backing vocals. Dave Wintour again played bass and Bob Henrit, of course, featured on drums. Richard Blanchard once again added some backing vocals. Same line-up as the previous release but a conflict on the front cover of the sleeve, which makes no mention of the Barnett Dogs at all and refers to the album as being a Russ Ballard release.

The new LP was brought to the public's attention via a large press ad featured in the usual music papers. A live black and white stage shot of Russ smiling and playing his trademark silver Stratocaster with the headline, "The dark giant of rock". Underneath in smaller print, the advert continues "Not since his Top 5 might with Argent has Russ's sheer force been harnessed within a single band. With the strength of 25 million record sales and the passion of a man and his 'Strat' **Russ Ballard & The Barnett Dogs step Into the Fire**". There we have it. This project was intended to be a fully-fledged band release, presumably with an expectation that this line-up would proceed to go on the road. An exciting prospect.

On the subject of the iconic silver Strat, the sleeve features Russ leaping in the air with it tightly gripped in his right hand, javelin like, on his own, not a Barnett Dog in sight. The design is credited to Media Management, and the photographer was award winning Dutchman Govert De Roos. You can see some of Govert's other work by visiting his Facebook page.

Kicking off Side One with **Rock & Roll Lover**, this tells the story of Julie, barely out of school, who hangs around backstage weekly at the end of every gig hoping, like some of her friends, to get a backstage pass and something more than the autographed photo I sometimes used to queue for. I think I'm right in saying that the age of the groupie is long gone and was most likely in decline even back in

1981. I suppose in the current light, this topic is rather taboo, but as far as the song is concerned, it's a good opener and, musically at least, still sounds good today.

The next track, **Breakdown**, is very similar to material from the previous **Barnet Dogs** album. Raunchy rock, with a particularly tasty guitar solo. Not necessarily commercial enough for consideration as a potential single release, it is nevertheless infectious. I particularly like the third song **Where Do We Go from Here**. This represents a departure from the heavier style, the song building slowly with piano and lyrics tackling the case of a couple who have reached a crossroads in their relationship. Do they part or stay together? The writer is still in desperately in love and wants to commit to one last attempt to save the relationship, but will his partner agree? It's a strong and likeable song.

Two songs remain on the opening side. The first of these is **Guilty**. Bob Henrit kick-starts the song with a drum intro before the band join in. The rhythm is slow but steady with a strong chorus featuring some impressive backing harmony vocals. Russ gets a chance to shine on guitar with a fine solo but it's the prominent bassline that underpins the song, courtesy of David Wintour. There's also a false ending which tricks the listener only to lead into another strong guitar solo from Russ. I used to love it in the good old days when bands used to catch radio DJs out with these false endings!

[https://youtu.be/j-\\_1uALjxa0](https://youtu.be/j-_1uALjxa0)

[Russ Ballard - Guilty](https://youtu.be/j-_1uALjxa0)

[youtu.be](https://youtu.be/j-_1uALjxa0)

From the album Into The Fire  
released in 1981

The final beat of **Guilty** leads straight into the final track of the opening side, **Don't Go To Soho**. In my opinion it's not the best song on the album, but, even so, it's got a catchy chanting chorus and lots of tasty lead guitar playing. This song wouldn't have looked out of place on the previous album as it is more on the heavier style.

Turning the disc over, Side Two kicks off with **Tonight**. Not just a great song instrumentally, the lyric cleverly tells the cat and mouse story of boy meets girl in a bar and describes their individual thought processes as the guy contemplates making a move whilst the girl sighs as she wonders what's taking him so long. This is one song that will never suffer from lyrical obsolescence unless, God forbid, the world turns completely towards internet dating. Next up is **Madman**. Another song with thought provoking lyrics. It's a deceptively strong song with a great bridge featuring a spoken extract from **Tell Me** by **Colin Williams**. I mistakenly thought this was spoken by Russ's daughter Karis, but the sleeve points out that it was courtesy of Manchester Grammar School, so my memory is clearly not as good as it used to be. Whilst on "RB cover watch", I spotted a version some time ago by **Tokyo Blade**, which was released in 1983.

The remaining three songs are far removed from the heavier musical direction of the previous **Barnet Dogs** album. **Strangers** is quite mellow, almost country-like. It commences with a vocal harmony intro accompanied by strummed acoustic guitar and a little backing keyboards. The kind of song you'd maybe associate with **Smokie**, it then gathers pace as it reaches the chorus. It's quite a pleasant inoffensive song that sounds as good today as it did on its release. Needless to say, it's got the RB trademark. A chorus that gets into your head and stays there.

The penultimate album track deserves a special mention. I was rather surprised when **Here Comes The Hurt** was released as a single. Not to be confused with the Hank Ballard song with the same title, it seems on first hearing a rather pedestrian song and quite different to anything I'd heard from Russ previously. On hearing it for the first few times I have to confess I didn't like it. A first for me. Maybe this was because it was so different to previous singles, but, looking back, I guess this was probably intentional. Every attempt so far to enter the charts had fallen short. Meanwhile a number of artists were having success on the back of his "lighter" songs, including acts such as **Kandidate**, **Hot Chocolate**, **the Pointer Sisters** and **Elkie Brooks**. Maybe it was worth Russ himself trying this lighter approach? Whatever the reasoning, it failed to make an impact. But it needs to be understood that we are talking 1981, a time when punk had come and gone, modern romance had given way to new wave and we were just starting to see the shoots of a synth pop explosion. Talking of which, I discovered the existence a cover version of **Here Comes the Hurt** by an Australian band

called **2AM**. Released in 1985 by Wizard Records, it is claimed to be a synth pop version. I wish I could hear it, but my searches for an mp3 have proved fruitless.

**Into the Fire** closes with one of my favourites. Beyond a few of the more popular Christmas Carols, I've never been one for remembering lyrics. Had I ever had the good fortune to stand on the winner's podium at the Grand Prix or line-up with team mates at the FA Cup Final at Wembley, the TV cameras would soon pick me out singing the wrong words. Not that this was ever likely to happen given that my driving skills are about as good as my football skills. No, I'm more into the instrumental side of music; catchy choruses, interesting chord sequences and changes, unexpected bass notes, and shifts in rhythm. Over the years I've noticed that sometimes Russ's songs have well-constructed lyrics whilst others are quite simplistic and even clichéd. Interestingly, the latter often turn out to be the hit records whereas those with crafted lyrics make up some of the gems to be found by purchasing the albums. **I Will be There** has a lot of words and is well written. It features a nice guitar riff and another lively bassline from Dave Wintour. It was released as a single in March 1981. One reviewer described it as "not exactly Heavy Metal – more Light Alloy" adding "This is the sort of song they use in films about rock music – it catches an image but not an essence". I'm not sure I understand that but I'll take his word for it. I'm not sure my document writing software understood it either, as it immediately went into overdrive underlining it as being grammatically incomprehensible. How do you tell spellcheck to leave things alone, that you know it's nonsensical but you are just repeating what the man said?

Four years later this same song re-appeared in the shops as a cover version by a group called **Gogmagog**. This was a "supergroup" comprising ex-members of **Iron Maiden**, **Gillan**, **Def Leppard** and **Whitesnake**. They were assembled by music entrepreneur **Jonathan King**. A promising collective but, for whatever reason, despite positive reviews, the project turned out to be very short-lived. Unfortunately, the same can be said for the **Barnet Dogs** as this was the last we would see or hear of them. Bob continues to work with Russ, of course, Bill Roberts resides in the Republic of Ireland and is still active in music, often posting his own compositions on his Facebook page. Dave Wintour, took up employment with The Wurzels from 1995 – 2002, which came as a bit of a shock to me at least, though the last I heard he had abandoned the cider drinking and was playing bass with former Thin Lizzy guitarist Eric Bell's band.



*l-r; The picture sleeve for the Dutch release of Here Comes the Hurt, a cover version by 2AM, the label for the original version of I Will Be There, and the picture sleeve for Gogmagog's cover version released in 1985.*

**Into the Fire** received quite favourable ratings from the UK press. Its release marked the end of an era as Russ parted company with Epic Records. Apart from compilation releases, there would be an extended gap before Russ would re-appear back under his own name on a new record label. However, having greatly developed and honed his writing and producing skills, he would be very busy doing other things in the meantime. More to come shortly!

## RECORDED BY OTHERS

We have had this one before...April 2015, actually, but we have had a lot of new readers since then, so, so you don't have to look it up yourself after reading Dave's article, here is Gogmagog!

<https://youtu.be/NwvicneV1mw>

[Gogmagog - I Will Be There](https://youtu.be/NwvicneV1mw)  
[youtu.be](https://youtu.be/NwvicneV1mw)

Fantastic song by British supergroup Gogmagog, from their EP "I Will Be There", released in 1985. Lyrics: When you're hurt Scared Feel you can't go on With t...