



(Banner by Sven Kramer)

We have had a good number of new readers recently, mostly via the website. Welcome to you all. We would love to hear from you.

Thanks go to Sven for our gorgeous new banner. You can see the same theme in the heading to the NEWS section of the website.

Dave's article this month is a little bit different. Instead of looking at Russ's music, he is writing about his possible influences. Also thanks to Greg and Gordon for their contributions. This is just what we want.

Sue

THIS MONTH

Russ: *"Allo, Everybody....Wow, these months fly by don't they. You've no doubt heard the expression, "All work and no play makes Jack..."...Oh, you know the rest. Well, I keep telling myself what I do isn't work - Ya see, with writing and recording there's always things to learn.....Every song is a new idea, new tempo, new chords [or not] - new subjects, new words....the list is endless....Also, if we're lucky, we get to work with inspiring people.*

This past month, I've been in the studio with my Son Christian and Alex Hepburn. Alex is a Star in France, where she's had hit records - She's also a judge on their version of X Factor. Alex started working with Christian a year ago and he has co-written and produced most of Alex's new

album. They asked if I would like to work with them on an idea for a single. I heard their idea and thought it was brilliant...we worked for three or four days on the track and I'm pleased to say it's scheduled to be her new single. I must say, it was a fab experience - Christian's the best engineer I've worked with and Alex is one of the best singers I've ever worked with, if not the best....Maybe that's why the month has passed so fast!

So, you see, making music isn't work....Anyway, my names not Jack - I'll keep you updated on release, TV's, etc.

Also, I have written a song for the new Graham Bonnet Album, "Meanwhile, Back In The Garage"...Graham contacted me last Autumn and asked if I'd write something for his new album, so, I wrote 'Living in Suspicion ' I don't know if it's to be a single, however, he's singing as good as ever. The album will be out in July.

Enjoy the rest of Flaming June....Much Love, Russ x"

Also from Alex Hepburn and co-written by Christian.. (Maybe there should be a warning about the beginning!)

<https://youtu.be/-gT63d5omlQ>

[Alex Hepburn - I Believe \(Official Music Video\)](https://youtu.be/-gT63d5omlQ)

[youtu.be](https://youtu.be/-gT63d5omlQ)

Official music video for Alex Hepburn's new single "I

Believe", out now: [https://](https://AlexHepburn.Ink.to/ibelieveAY)

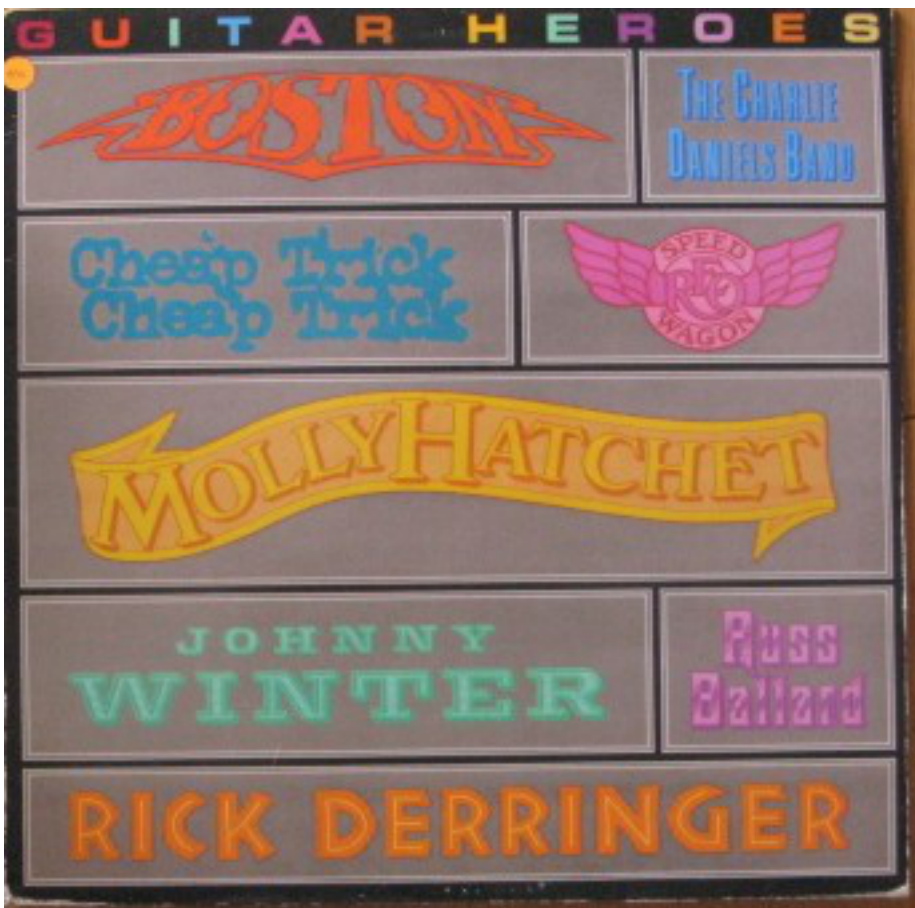
AlexHepburn.Ink.to/ibelieveAY

Directed by Sashinski Produced by Familia Film...

LETTERS

From Greg Zimmermann

While going through my record collection recently, I came across an LP that I'd almost forgotten about. It's called "Guitar Heroes" and came out in the UK in 1980 on the Epic label. It features Epic artists Boston, REO Speedwagon, Molly Hatchet, Johnny Winter, Rick Derringer, Cheap Trick, Charlie Daniels Band and of course Russ Ballard himself who joins in the fun with "Cast The Spirit".



I bought this LP in London in about 1982 or 1983, and this is what it looks like. I have no idea how familiar your newsletter readers are with this release. On the back, there is a nice little paragraph on each artist. I think it's wonderful to have Russ on an album entitled "Guitar Heroes" – because that's exactly what he is to me (among other things). Everybody always admires his songwriting skills, but his guitar playing hardly ever gets more than a cursory mention.

Best wishes

Greg

<https://youtu.be/KaFMZUV6k4g>

[Russ Ballard - Cast](#)

[The Spirit](#)

[youtu.be](#)

From Russ's At The Third Stroke album

From Greg Zimmermann

We attended a concert last night, it was The Graham Bonnet Band. Graham and his band performed both "SOS" and "Since You've Been Gone", and Graham actually mentioned Russ. He said: "This is a song called "SOS" by Russ Ballard. Russ wrote "Since You've Been Gone", and he also wrote "SOS" – he wrote it for me. Thank you, Russ Ballard!" I thought it nice of him to mention Russ.

Best wishes

Greg

From Gordon Dickson

Just thought I would drop you a few lines after receipt of the May News. Really enjoyed the article by Dave Williams on Argent during their Epic years and thought die-hard Argent fans like myself might want a little more additional info.

Dave mentions the track Closer to Heaven that he had difficulty tracking down and was on the Hold Your Head Up EP. It is also available on the Esoteric Recording Definitive Remastered Edition of All Together Now (ECLEC 2321) released in 2012, as a bonus track. The album was completely remastered and the sound quality is excellent with Russ's guitar playing really a delight.

Other than the Argent albums not featuring Russ (Circus & Counterpoints) there are three other recordings worth mentioning as they all feature Russ. The 1997

BBC release, Argent The BBC Sessions (SFRSCD039) is certainly worth investigation. It includes their first BBC session broadcast on 9th September 1970 for Bob Harris's In Concert show. There are 13 tracks, 7 of them written by Russ. I recall Allan "Fluff " Freeman plugging the long version of Hold Your Head Up on his Saturday afternoon rock show which eventually broke Argent. Both "Fluff " and Whispering Bob had a lot to do with Argent getting their well deserved exposure. Besides the four sessions recorded for Bob Harris they also completed memorable sessions for John Peel and Mike Harding. If only the BBC could track them down and release them. Add the Old Grey Whistle test appearances and we would have a true collectors piece.

Next is a strange one. Inside Argent (CRP1814), An Independent Critical Review of the band. The CD and the DVD, both released in 2005, are unauthorised and are not associated or approved in any way by Argent or their management. The critics are well known rock producers & writers, Bob Carruthers, Les Davidson, Michael Heatley & Malcolm Dome. Some great stuff for Argent and Russ fans, even archive footage of Unit 4 Plus 2 featuring Russ and Bob Henrit from 1969. There is archive footage from the Old Grey Whistle test and even Set of 6 which was broadcast on Granada TV in 1972. Well worth seeking out. Lots of praise for Russ and Bob including comment that Bob was one of the best rock drummers around. Lots of support for that I'm sure !

Last of the bunch is Argent's appearance at High Voltage, which took place in Victoria Park on 25th July 2010. A typical High Voltage recording, track listings wrong and production a bit ropey but the double CD is a must. The first time the original band had got together in 36 years. That alone makes it a worthy addition to any Argent fan's collection. Russ's playing on the day is sublime. You can feel he was really up for it.

By way of information I saw Russ perform at Childline Rocks! Which took place at the IndigO2 on 13/3/08. Bob Harris was the presenter and the line up included Roger Daltrey, several members of Marillion, Thunder, Fish, Ian Paice, Glen Hughes, The Zombies and Russ. I recall Russ said that the event was his first live UK appearance in over 25 years. Perhaps you could ask Russ if I am correct. (Russ: *"It was 25, I think"*)

Just had a look at my framed concert ticket collection which now runs to 28 extra large frames. I have kept every ticket for every concert I have attended in over 44 years. Prized ticket, my Led Zeppelin reunion concert at the O2 .

First concert was The Faces at the legendary Glasgow Greens Playhouse (which later was called the Glasgow Apollo) on 2nd June 1972, £1.00 a ticket, sit where you like! In this first frame are my Argent tickets. The 29th November 1974 ticket even describes the concert as in " Quadrophonic Sound " all for the princely sum of £1.50. In these days Russ and the boys were doing 2 UK tours a year. I saw them on 14/2/74 and 29/11/74. Last show I saw them in Glasgow was 22/10/75 but Russ had left by then.

In my humble opinion Argent were one of the finest rock bands to grace the UK and never really got the recognition they deserved. With Jim Rodford's recent passing we will never see the original band again unfortunately but their music will never be forgotten.

Sorry for rambling on a bit but Dave's article just rekindled my appreciation of the band which led me to following Russ's solo career all these years .

Best wishes
Gordon

RUSS'S MUSIC HISTORY

By Dave Williams

Russ and the BBC – Part One

This month I had planned to look at the musical activities of Russ between the final **Barnet Dogs** release, **Into the Fire** and his re-emergence as a solo artist on EMI America. But I had a sudden change of mind, probably as a result of that wonderful event in Ware. Watching Russ performing with **The Roulettes** and performing some tracks from the swinging sixties, then performing some of his later hits, I thought it might be interesting to look at some of Russ's influences over the years. What better way of doing that than to rely on the good old BBC, better known of course as the British Broadcasting Corporation, or 'Auntie Beeb' for short!

In 1976, BBC Radio One launched a new Saturday lunchtime show called **'My Top Twelve'** in which invited celebrities were interviewed and their twelve favourite songs were played. I guess you could think of it as Desert Island Discs without the sand and the sea. Russ's appearance on the show was quite early in the series and was broadcast shortly before he went out on his debut solo tour. Russ would of course repeat the exercise on Radio 2 for the **Ken Bruce Show** in 2016. Would he choose the same songs? All will be revealed next month but for this newsletter we will slip back to 1976 to take a look at the twelve numbers that Russ chose.

The first selection needs little introduction and was very familiar to everyone at the time of the broadcast. It remains as popular today. I refer to **Alright Now** by the band **Free**, the band fronted by vocalist **Paul Rodgers** and featuring the excellent **Paul Kossoff** on guitar, talented songwriter **Andy Fraser** on bass and keyboards, both sadly no longer with us, and **Simon Kirke** on drums. **All Right Now** was released in 1970, reaching No.2 in the UK charts, and chalked up similar success around the globe. It became the band's signature tune although they would go on to have other hits including My Brother Jake, and Little Bit of Love. Sadly, **Free** were relatively short lived due to disharmony within the band and not helped by Kossoff's battle with drug addiction. Sadly, just as he was getting his life back together with his new band Back Street Crawler, Kossoff suffered a fatal heart attack during a flight. Andy Fraser passed away in March 2015, also as a result of a heart attack. After **Free's** demise, **Paul Rodgers** and **Simon Kirke** would go on to have further chart success together with **Bad Company**. More recently **Paul Rodgers** recorded and toured with **Queen**.

I Never Loved a Man (the way I love you) by **Aretha Franklin** was Russ's second pick. Born in Detroit, Aretha has been referred to by many as the greatest singer that ever lived and is universally referred to as the "Queen of Soul". However, success didn't come overnight. Six years as a jazz singer with Columbia Records had brought only modest success, and when the company allowed her contract to lapse, Jerry Wexler pounced and took

her to Atlantic Records. His intention was to model her as a female version of **Ray Charles**, moving her away from jazz and more towards a mixture of gospel, soul and R&B. A recording session was set up at **FAME studios** in Muscle Shoals, Alabama with owner Rick Hall producing. Aretha was asked to sit at the piano and sing and play. As she started to play the opening bars of a song she'd brought with her, written by Ronnie Shannon, everyone in the room could feel the magic and Hall quickly set about getting it onto tape. As soon as Wexler heard the finished recording, he knew he had a hit on his hands. **I Never Loved a Man** was a massive hit, reaching No.9 in the Billboard charts, whilst the album of the same name was certified gold. Interestingly the recording session was later abandoned after a fight broke out between Aretha's then husband and the trumpet player who he'd caught flirting with his wife.



All Right Now, I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You), Beach Boys - When I Grow Up (to be a man), Lean on Me, Hound Dog, Hard Times

When I grow Up (to be a Man) by **The Beach Boys** was recorded in 1964. Hailing from California, and renowned for their stylish vocal harmonies and surf songs, **Russ** cites them as his favourite American band. They have chalked up something like thirty-six US Top 40 hits and sold over 100 million records worldwide. This song was recorded in 1964 and was written by **Brian Wilson** and **Mike Love**. The lyrics tackle the subject of approaching adulthood and how life might change during the transition from boy to man. Bigger success came a couple of years later with the classic album *Pet Sounds* and the single *Good Vibrations*. I've heard many people say that they prefer their earlier songs, so maybe this choice suggests **Russ** is one of them?

Back to the 1970s for the next choice, and it's another classic. **Bill Withers** first came to light with the single **Ain't No Sunshine** from his first album. This album was followed by *Still Bill*, which I clearly remember the British DJ Dave Lee Travis raving about on his radio show. When "DLT" took to a record he certainly made sure the Great British public knew about it. Other favourite artists he helped bring to the masses included the Doobie Brothers, ELO, Jim Croce and Steely Dan. The song chosen by **Russ** was **Lean on Me**, released in April 1972. Surprisingly the single would only reach No.18 in the UK charts and it would be another five years before Bill's next big hit, *Lovely Day*, the one where he holds a note for a world record breaking 18 seconds, would take him up to a respectable No.7. Not only has **Lean on Me** been covered by a multitude of other artists, the sentiments expressed in the lyrics have led to its frequent use as a theme tune for fundraising and charity events.

The arrival on the music scene of this next artist created an incredible buzz, so I don't think anyone will be surprised to see **Elvis Presley** listed among **Russ's** favourites. His choice was **Hound Dog** from 1956. Penned by the famous songwriting partnership of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, the song has been covered more than 250 times. Hey that's nearly as many as **Since You Been Gone**...ok, not quite, but you never know, there's still time! How fitting though. Earlier we had the **Queen of Soul** and now, in selecting **Elvis**, she is joined by the **King of Rock and Roll**.

When I think of **The 5th Dimension** I associate them with the songs *Aquarius* and *Let The Sunshine In*. They released an album called **Up Up and Away**, named after the Jimmy Webb composition that would become a massive hit. **Russ** bought the album and considered every song to be phenomenal. The LP included a cover of Tim Hardin's *Misty Roses*, which **Colin Blunstone** went on to reproduce to great effect. **Russ's** chosen song was a different love ballad called **Rosecrans Bvd**. New to me, it is very 1960s in its arrangement. Check it out on You Tube.

<https://youtu.be/9euxTl8unC8>

[5th Dimension:](#)
[Rosecrans Boulevard](#)
[youtu.be](#)

Jimmy Webb song from Up, up and away album 1967. The weird instrumental bit at the end (2:53 to 2:57) is part of the original recording!

The story behind the next song chosen by **Russ** involves a little girl deciding to write a song for Little Richard, real name Richard Penniman, in an effort to raise money to treat her aunt who was ill and in need of an operation. At the time, the artist was still smarting after Pat Boone released a cover of his first hit Tutti Frutti and took it to a higher chart placing than the original. Penniman was adamant that this would not happen a second time and set out to record something with faster paced lyrics so that Boone wouldn't be able to tackle it. It so happened that some of the lyrics provided by the little girl were suited to this idea, and whilst a few alterations were required, young Enortis Johnson earned a credit as a co-writer. Ironically, Boone did later tackle the song, but his version fell two places short of Little Richard's No.6 chart placing. The song was of course covered by **The Beatles** and is renowned as being the longest serving song in their repertoire, as they were using it way back in the days of The Quarrymen. In his semi-pro days **Russ** used to sing **Long Tall Sally** four times a night. Did we hear this one in Ware? I don't think we did. Maybe this is one for Brian Barry to sing if RBE2 happens next year! **Little Richard** has undoubtedly led a colourful life and at 85 years old he's still with us.



Long Tall Sally, I Pity the Fool, Elgar: Enigma Variations, Too Close To Heaven, Up, Up And Away, Little Queenie

Russ said his next chosen artist doesn't receive the credit he deserves for all the musicians that he's influenced over the years. He was referring to the late great **Ray Charles**. The song put forward by **Russ** was **Hard Times**. Blind from the age of 7 years old, Brother Ray as he was known to his friends, encompassed a whole host of genres including R&B, soul, jazz and blues, not to mention gospel. He was a fantastic songwriter and pianist in addition to having a voice capable of expressing the deepest emotions. His music was capable of appealing to people of all ages and race. Take a listen to **Hard Times**, sit back, close your eyes and let it wash over you. Three minutes of blues heaven. Hard Times (Who Knows Better Than I).

Ann Peebles came to mass attention in 1974 with her single **I Can't Stand the Rain**. Another American singer heavily influenced by gospel and R&B, **Russ** was aware of her much earlier and chose **I Pity the Fool** for his top twelve. He considered her to have the best voice around at that time, which made her particularly exciting, and one of her songs, I'm Gonna Tear Your Playhouse Down, would later become a hit for British artist Paul Young. Whilst she continues to perform, Ann never reached the dizzy heights that seemed her destiny. It has been said that she didn't take her career seriously enough. Ann's own view is that she was content with the success she achieved at that time. She had a husband and a young child and considered her family to be priority. She realised that stardom would draw her away from her family, a similar decision process that **Russ** found himself in towards the end of 1976.

If **Rod Argent** had included the next song in his list of favourites I wouldn't have raised an eyelid, though I'm not sure why I would question **Russ** choosing to include a classical track. Then again, **the Enigma Variations** by **Elgar** are rather unique. Based on an original melody, the collective piece of work consists of 14 'variations', each of these supposedly based on a friend of the composer, the music reflecting characteristics of those persons e.g. maybe a laugh or a particular habit of the individual, or even a memorable occurrence such as a private conversation. The grand finale is the 14th variation, but Russ chose Variation IX, **Nimrod**, as his favourite, stating that he enjoys melody and emotion in music and this piece of music has both. It was allegedly inspired by a conversation between **Edward Elgar** and a German friend, Augustus Jaegar, the subject of the conversation being Ludwig van Beethoven. Jaegar was a great source of encouragement to Elgar at a time when he was going through a spell of depression and considering abandoning his career as a composer.

Those of us who were lucky enough to catch one of the **Argent** reunion shows a few years ago won't be surprised to discover **Little Queenie** featured on Russ's list. This was of course written and recorded by **Chuck Berry** in 1959. Chuck had previously used the basic melody a year earlier for Run Rudolph Run, a pre-Noddy Holder Christmas release. Interestingly **Russ's** favoured version is by **Jerry Lee Lewis**. The story goes that Jerry's mother adored the original and continually kept singing it, much to his annoyance. He didn't care for Chuck's version and decided to record his own take, which he then presented to his mother. There's nothing on record that suggests his mother preferred her son's version, but **Russ** obviously did, and he still enjoys playing the song to this day.

This brings us to the final selection, song No.12. Interestingly this song pulls everything together. **Wasn't That a Mighty Day** by the **Stars of Faith** featuring **Alex Bradford** is taken from the musical **Black Nativity, Gospel on Broadway**, written by Langston Hughes. Using an all-black cast and based on the gospel of St Luke, the musical brings together actors, singer,

dancers and musicians to celebrate an event that took place over 2000 years ago. It features traditional Christmas songs sung in a gospel style along with some new material specifically written for the show. Professor Alex Bradford was a gospel singer from Alabama whose music influenced the likes of Little Richard and Ray Charles. Performances of the musical continue annually in Boston and a film version was released in 2013.

I'm not sure whether there were any boundaries set by the producer of the **My Top Twelve** show, but it's pleasing that **Russ** chose to avoid some of the more obvious or familiar songs by the artists he drew upon. For example, **Aretha** is probably best known for **Respect**, **Ann Peebles** for **I Can't Stand the Rain** and **Ray Charles** for **What'd I Say**, **Georgia on my Mind**, **Hit the road Jack** and **Unchain my Heart**.

It's interesting to see that, in his formative years, **Russ** was drawn towards gospel, soul and rock and roll with a spoonful of blues thrown in. Taking **Argent** into consideration, coupling those influences with those of **Rod Argent** with his leanings towards jazz and blues and the addition of classical, jazz and rock influences of **Argent's** third writer **Chris White**, that must have been some melting pot!

RECORDED BY OTHERS

Thanks to Greg for the reminder. S.O.S. was on Graham Bonnet's third solo album, Line-Up, released in November 1981. Russ played guitar on the album track.

<https://youtu.be/btwZg5ZaS-U>