



(Header by Sven)

Welcome to our new readers. We hope you enjoy the newsletter. We would love to hear from you.

Some of us are still in lockdown, others slowly emerging. There has been plenty of time to listen to music, especially Russ's music. Good luck to you all as you come out 'into the light'.

Russ enjoyed a video, which was sent to him by Brian...a biopic of Doc Pomus, blues singer and songwriter. This sparked Russ's memories of working with Mort Shuman, who was, at one time, Doc Pomus's writing partner. Dave's article, this month, gives further background to this story and for those who would like to find out more I have put the link to the video after Dave's article. It is long so settle down with it. I was going to watch it in parts but Carole said, "You will watch it all at once, you won't be able to leave it". She was right. It is fascinating and, sometimes, surprising and I would bet that you will end up telling someone else about the story.

Mike Nolan wrote to Russ telling him his thoughts on It's Good To Be Here. I thought it was a good "review", though a review wasn't Mike's intention. He has given me permission to share it here as I thought others might like it too.

Dave has come up with another unusual track for his "Cover Quest"!

Thank you if you gave the FB page a like. We are now up to 5010, heading for 6000!

Best wishes
Sue

THIS MONTH FROM RUSS

When I was in my early teens and learning guitar, I listened to all the latest hit songs and I was also interested, not only in the artist but also, I was fascinated by the names under the song title. They, of course, were the songwriters. Regularly, being an Elvis fan, I'd see Leiber and Stoller.....They wrote many Elvis classics - Hound Dog, Jailhouse Rock, King Creole being a just a few. There were a dozen or so writers that cropped up regularly....Goffin and King, Neil Sedaka, Neil Diamond and a partnership that never let me down....Doc Pomus and Mort Shuman, they wrote many classic hits when I was developing my strumming. - Imagine when, in 1991, I received a phone call from Mort Shuman..... "Russ, I'd like to write some songs with you" - "I'd love that", I said. Mort explained to me, "I'm a big star in France". He smiled...so, he wanted songs for his album. Before I go any further, I want to give you a short list of the classic songs Mort co wrote. Are you ready? - 'Teenager in Love' - 'Sweets for my Sweet' - 'Save The Last Dance For Me' - 'Lonely Avenue' - 'Can't Get Used To Losing You' - 'Little Sister' (for Elvis) - 'Latest Flame'. (For Elvis), - 'Mess of The Blues'. (for Elvis) - 'Viva Las Vegas'. Oh, there were so many!! -

He came to my house in Great Amwell Village and that's where we wrote for five weeks, in my studio, situated in the house. We wrote four songs I believe, although we only finished two. He had some great stories and the coffee breaks were just chat about life. In a break, I said, "How many songs did you write for Elvis, Mort?" - "About thirty", he smiled....Wow! That's amazing", I said. "A lot of them were crap, cos we wrote for the movies". We both laughed. "What was Elvis like?" I asked...."Dunno, I never met him" - "You are kidding" I saidMort continued, "I said to Freddie Beinstock, I want to meet Elvis" (Freddie was publisher of Pomus and Shuman songs.....Freddie said, "You don't want to meet Elvis" - "I do". - "No, you don't want to meet Elvis". - "I do" Mort said again. - Freddie then came back with some great logic..."While Elvis is doing your songs, don't meet him....if you meet him and he don't like ya, he won't do your songs". - Well, I don't know about you, but that makes sense to me - basically - if it ain't broke don't fix it. The songs we wrote together

were 'Go'. and 'The Same Song'. Sadly, Mort had a liver transplant about eight months later but died soon after.....I regret I never knew him longer - Oh well!

I hope you're surviving this strange Covid Spring. I haven't seen the high street since March 10th. I do miss the Indian and Italian restaurants - apart from that, I'm fine with the studio everyday....It's better than work anyway....

Let's chat again in July!
Lots of Love,
Russ. xxx

RUSS'S MUSIC HISTORY

By Dave Williams

Shuman and Pomus

My attention was recently drawn to an artist called **Mort Shuman**. Apparently, he recorded a couple of songs written by **Russ** in 1991. These are two that are missing from my current list of 294 songs. Yes folks, there is still plenty more to write about in the future. Taking a quick look at Mort's biography, I felt it was worth looking at his career in a bit more depth than would normally feature in my covers article. The name might not be familiar but some of his work most certainly will be.

Shuman was born in Brooklyn, New York in November 1938 of Polish Jewish immigrants. He played piano and studied at Abraham Lincoln High School before going on to study music at New York Conservatory. He became a fan of R & B music and started to write songs, going on to form a songwriting partnership with another Brooklyn songwriter **Jerome Felder**.

Jerome "Jerry" Felder initially was a blues singer. Born in June 1925 and like **Shuman** of Jewish descent, he chose the stage name **Doc Pomus**, because "it sounded better". He recorded a number of songs, which were released by several labels, notably Chess. In the early 1950s he started writing for other artists including a song co-written with **Jerry Leiber** and **Mike Stoller** called **Young Blood**, a hit for the **Coasters**. The royalties were sufficient to convince him

to focus on songwriting as a career. By 1957 he had given up performing to concentrate solely on writing.

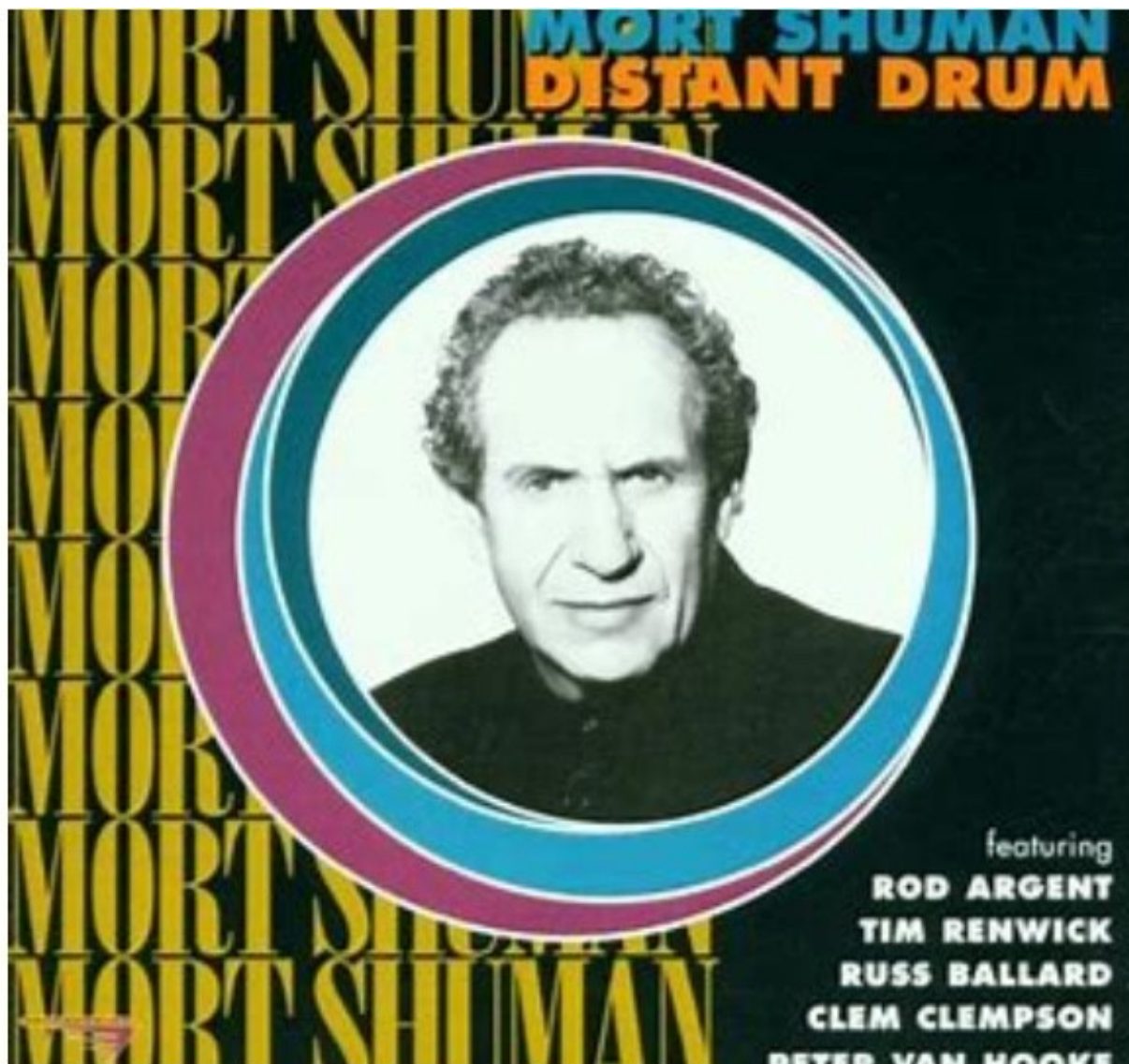
At this time, **Pomus** knew little about rock and roll, so he asked **Mort Shuman** to write with him. The two had met as a result of Shuman dating Pomus's younger cousin. The arrangement was that **Pomus** would write the lyrics and **Shuman** the melody, although they often worked on both. The result was a string of hits including **A Teenager In Love**, **Save The Last Dance For Me**, **Sweets For My Sweet**, a hit for both **The Drifters** and **The Searchers**, **Can't Get Used to Losing You**, **Suspicion**, **Viva Las Vegas** and **(Marie's the Name) His Latest Flame**. Their songs were recorded by artists including **Dion**, **Andy Williams**, **Bobby Darin** and of course **Elvis Presley**.

In the early 1960s they moved to London. This was at the start of the **British Invasion**, and they wrote songs for a number of British artists. They went separate ways in 1965, **Shuman** moving to Paris where he started his own recording career. He continued to write for British artists achieving success with **Sha La La La Lee** for **Small Faces**, co-written with **Kenny Lynch**, **Here I Go Again** for **The Hollies**, co-written with **Clive Westlake** and **Little Children**, a hit for **Billy J Kramer**.



Left to right; Mort Shuman (an Atlantic Records promo photo); Doc Pomus (Allmusic.com); Shuman & Pomus together (history-of-rock.com)

As a recording artist, Shuman was active from 1968 to 1991, releasing a number of albums, the final one being *Distant Drum*, a pop rock album released in 1991.



Produced by **Rod Argent** and **Peter Van Hooke**, the album features 12 songs mostly written by **Mort** himself, with one co-written with **Doc Pomus** and two co-written by **Mort** and **Russ Ballard**. These are titled **Go** and **Same Song**. To hear them, follow this link to the [allmusic.com](https://www.allmusic.com/album/distant-drum-mw0000675280) website, a great website for sourcing information on different artists and their catalogues <https://www.allmusic.com/album/distant-drum-mw0000675280> . Here you will find quite a bit of detail about the **Distant Drum** album, including the musicians who played on the sessions. These include such notables as **Dave “Clem” Clempson** (guitar), **Martin Ditcham** (percussion) and **Mo Foster** (bass).

One can only guess at how **Russ** came to work with the legendary songwriter **Mort Shuman**. Maybe Russ will enlighten us. Sadly, **Mort Shuman** died on 2nd November 1991, the year of the album’s release, after suffering complications due to a liver operation. He was just 52 years of age. Earlier in the same year **Doc Pomus** died on 14th March as a result of cancer.

Doc Pomus biopic:

<https://youtu.be/bWpyT3MoLNc> Enjoy!

RADIO INTERVIEW

At the beginning of the month Russ did an interview for Greater Manchester Rock Radio. The interviewer/presenter is Tony Charles, who will be playing tracks from It's Good To Be Here as well as older Russ tracks and some Argent. Russ will feature in **The Classic Album Tracks Show** on Saturday 20th June 6 - 8pm. It appears that the show will be available on 'listen again'. Check with the website for times.

Here is the link to get you there and listen live. <https://www.greatermanchesterrockradio.co.uk/services>

VIDEO REVIEW OF MIRACLES AND FLY AWAY

Dave came across this video on YouTube. One man's take on I Don't Believe In Miracles and Fly Away. If you haven't already watched this on the Facebook page give it a go. It left me smiling. The reviewer, Zaragon Trimaximalist, has also covered some Argent tracks.

<https://youtu.be/DzxGny7xE7k>

LETTERS

From Gianmaria Framarin

I was struck by Russ' lyrics **[Just Like Me]**... he's got it, he's always got it: truth lies in our feelings, in our instincts, deep down there... that's where we can connect. It's not politics, it's not taking part to stressful controversies on Facebook where people often speak of things they don't know anything about... I'm tired of watching people write about this virus as if they were virologists!!! Why do they need to choose a side and fight over it, when it's clearly not their 'heart and soul, blood and passion'? Too many people still act as if they had to pose... so everyone's into politics, everyone talks about that, well, <<I'm gonnae do that as well>>..... no, it doesn't work this way..... you don't need to do what other people do... you'd need to SHINE... so let your guts out, whatever they carry on, and let us see, let us enjoy what you really are deep inside... Music is one of the few things in life where things work this way, it grabs your guts, it moves you, there's no lie telling... thus there's still people who fight like dogs over their musical tastes...???????????????? Why???????? Why should I

stir some controversy up with another guy who can't take my tastes? He'll tell me (it happened thousands of times) I can't comprehend music just because I'm not much into some 'untouchable classic', I'll tell him I don't need these 'intellectual labels', I know what I like and I like what I know, quoting Genesis... So Russ' lyrics made their way into me: he's written something magic... so naturally... as if he's really speaking to those people in China or Africa in front of me while he's singing those lines...

Anyway, I'll say it again: let's try and connect with other people using what's deep inside of us, be it positive feelings or negative ones, no matter as long as it's true... it's there that lies all the best of us, our inspiration, our magic... I'm really tired of standing on the surface watching too many people still arguing about NOTHING.

A PERSONAL REVIEW OF IT'S GOOD TO BE HERE

From Mike Nolan

Here are a few of my thoughts on the album, which I think is really good, incidentally:

My Awakening: Some of the vocal and guitar work early on in this track remind me a little of Dean Ford (real name Tom MacAleese) vocals, and Junior Campbell (guitar) from Marmalade. The Hammond organ sound is brilliant - I take it it's not an original, but a modern keyboard voice. It sounds great anyway, whatever it is! I love your forceful drumming throughout and obviously your guitar and bass playing on this song - excellent! Some of the guitar work sounds like it's being played through a Leslie tone cabinet. Are you playing a Les Paul and a Strat on different parts of this track, plus a Precision bass? The lead vocal and backing harmony vocals are really strong and the whole mix sounds very good indeed. Your voice sometimes also reminds me a little of Peter Gabriel in places. A strong first track.

Time Machine: Early guitar notes on this song remind me a bit of Wishbone Ash or even Boston. Is that a Strat you're playing on this song? It sounds really nice, anyway. Your strong lead vocal sounds a bit like Neil Diamond in places and the harmonies on your backing vocals are excellent. I think your vocal range and singing style are really shown off on this track - excellent! I've got to mention your drumming, once again(!) - are you trying to do Bob out of a job? The bass guitar patterns also sound great. The final few chords are so powerful and overdriven and the very last chord sounds almost like it's coming out of a Leslie tone cabinet again - excellent!

Kicking the Can: I love the guitar intro. Some of the words, "future" for instance, sound rather like Liam Gallagher. That's not meant to come across as a criticism, by the way - just a thought! For many months prior to Covid-19, the only reference I knew to "kicking the can down the road" was by pundits commenting on Government dealings with Brexit! As stated on the previous tracks, your vocals, guitar, keyboard work and drumming are all excellent. A great guitar finish, too!

Annabel's Place: I love the electric piano intro and general keyboard work, including the Hammond Organ sound on this track. I can hear that Leslie sound again - very effective. Sometimes, your voice sounds like Alex Harvey of SAHB fame. As before, I like all the instrumentation - particularly the staccato keyboard treble notes. The lead vocal and harmonies are excellent, once again. I can also hear you hitting a wood block or a cowbell and hand claps on this track. I first heard this song on YouTube. A really good track and a nice mix of instruments, once again!

Wasted: Great acoustic guitar and keyboard voices throughout on this song. I love the violins and cello sounds, too. As always, the lead and backing vocals sound great. What particular keyboard voice is that from near the end to the finish, or is it an acoustic guitar - surely not? Also, how are you getting the echoing "smack" on this track - what are you using? The whole thing sounds really good, anyway! What acoustic guitar are you using on this track - it sounds really good?

Colliding: All instrumentation and vocals sound great and there's an echoing "smack" again, but a different one this time! The bass guitar seems more prominent and busier on this track than on some of the others. The acoustic and electric guitar sounds are great and it all comes together very well. Have you got some of the instruments on a loop and what guitars are you using?

Tidal Wave: So much going on in this song. Again, all instrumentation and vocals come across really well. I love the guitar and keyboard sounds, including the tremolo effect. The bass pattern sounds busy and not straightforward and the various chord sequences are great. Another good track.

The First Man That Ever Danced: Great effects for the intro and throughout. Strong vocals. Busy bass and percussion in places on this track, too. Altogether, this is a really powerful song, with a great drum kit finish.

The Misunderstood: The various instrument sounds, lovely chords, chord progressions and bass patterns are all excellent in this song. Very effective drum entry after the guitar intro, too. Your vocals are really good, once again. Lovely piano and guitar sounds later on, which remind me of both Bruce Hornsby and the Range and Junior Campbell, once again! It sounds like you're using a Les Paul on this song. A great track!

Proud Man: Lovely guitar, organ and drum accompaniment on the intro and throughout on this track. Great lead and backing vocals and lead guitar riffs and solo over the vocals towards the end. The chorus of this song is almost anthem-like. Great!

New York Groove: I'd never heard your rendition of this song before, with just a hint of the Bo Diddley's throughout! I also love the piano sound. Much of my thoughts are the same as my earlier comments on other tracks. I like the key change and the guitar, piano and vocals are all lovely. Your vocal range comes across very well, once again, including the falsetto backing vocals. Nice piano accompaniment towards the end.

Since You've Been Gone: WOW!! This is one of Carol's and my own favourite songs since we've been together. I knew exactly what to expect from this track, so just imagine my complete and utter surprise to hear the slow (but lovely) piano introduction, then your emotional vocal, accompanied by those mournful cello sounds and that lovely piano work! OK, so after the first verse, it will pick up to "normal" speed - but no!, it just became more tortured and the cellos, together with the subtle piano chord changes made it even more dramatic and emotional as it went along! Then there was the key change with your still pained vocals and that lovely mellow sounding guitar and the cellos being joined by violins - absolutely brilliant! Even the long last vocal note had its own final piece of emotion, with the "clip" on the very end of it! On my very first hearing of this version of the song, I literally ended up with tears in my eyes. After hearing it dozens more times, I get the self-same reaction! A great version of a terrific song! The slow tempo and your clever use of piano, strings and guitar is probably even more in keeping with the mood and theme of the song than your original, upbeat version - absolutely excellent!!

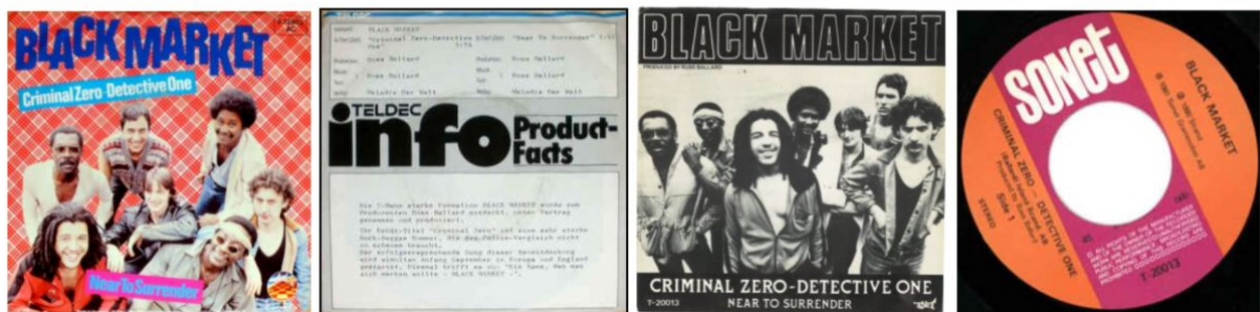
You Can Do Magic: I'd never heard your version of this song before listening to "It's good to be here" but, as you had played practically everything on the version by America, perhaps I actually had, without realising it! Anyway, as stated many times about earlier tracks on this CD, I felt your lead and harmony vocals, the lovely use of piano, with and without echo, and the strings

accompaniment amounted to a strong final track on a terrific album! This is certainly far removed from Cheshunt Boy's Club days but, even then, you and Bob stood out for me in the band. It's really odd that hearing this song on Johnny Walker's BBC Radio 2 show back in September last year, started me off researching your career throughout the years and made me realise just how successful you've been for such a long time, both as a song writer and as a recording/performing artist, who has penned so many excellent, diverse and iconic songs for a great number of bands and solo artists throughout UK, Europe and USA. Your success is richly deserved and this is a great album to add to your list of triumphs! I also feel that both Christian and Sven each deserve a special mention for their own separate, but important parts, in making this project complete. It's a great album to listen to. Thank you so much for all of your hard work!

DAVE'S COVER QUEST

Sharp-eyed newsletter readers might have spotted that we jumped from No.12 to No.14. It's quite a while ago now, so any claims for a 'spot the deliberate mistake' prize will be rejected! So, what actually happened to No.13? Was it left out because 13 is unlucky? Well no. It was pulled at the last minute because I couldn't find any information on the song or the artist, nor proof that it was actually a Russ Ballard song. I've tried a few times since without luck, but today I had another shot at it and struck gold at the first attempt. It is 100% a Russ Ballard song and in fact, so is the B side.

No.13



Criminal Zero - Detective One / Near to Surrender by Black Market

The reason I struggled to find any information was because I was under the impression that the artist was **Criminal Zero** and the song was called **Detective One**. Searching under those words took me in the direction of gangsta rap music, and despite all the musical genres that encompass Russ's songs, I thought this was stretching things. My instincts were right, and I now know that **Criminal Zero – Detective One** is a helping of infectious reggae from a band called **Black Market**. Unfortunately, I've not been able to find anything out at all about **Black Market**, and I suspect it might be their only release. The record was released by Sonet in 1980 and sleeve notes claim that the 7-piece band were discovered by **Russ** and compares them favourably with **The Police**, who were of course massive at that time. The single was released in Germany and Sweden and was produced by **Russ** himself. It sounds like he contributed the lead guitar solo too. What makes it so catchy? It's the chorus with its backing vocal responses 'Detective One, Detective Two, Detective Three' and the reggae bass line. I do feel for the lead vocalist who has to stretch his voice out of its comfort zone at the end of the verse. He just about gets away with it, and I really like the song.

The B side features a reggae version of **Near to Surrender**, a song that was originally used by **Roger Daltrey** on his **Ride a Rock Horse** album. It seems to translate to reggae quite easily, but for me it's the A side that steals the show. Both songs can be listened to on You Tube using the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fok-ukfvtt8>