

(Header by Sven)

Welcome to our new readers. We would love to hear from you.

There are a couple of things in this newsletter, again, for those of you are not on Facebook. If you have time on your hands...plenty to keep you going here. Shut out the winter weather and enjoy.

Dave's article this month will be of interest to Zombies and Argent fans as well as Russ's fans. If you know someone who comes into one of those categories, please feel free to forward this newsletter to them. You will have to scroll down to see who it is!

Don't forget to pop over to Russ's Facebook page and add some "likes" to Carole's great posts...photos, videos and the latest news. <https://www.facebook.com/RussBallardMusicOfficial>

Thank you to everyone who sent their birthday greetings for Russ, either a written message or a video. Sven was able to put together a brilliant compilation video for him. The short video we had in the newsletter birthday email and which was on the Facebook page was the intro to his

video. Many thanks to Sven for doing that. I know Russ loved it. (I wrote this paragraph after Russ had read this newsletter! 😊)

Best wishes

Sue

THIS MONTH FROM RUSS

Good morning, my friends....First of all, thanks for the birthday wishes, it's always very moving to me. There's some out there who have said, "You're as old as you feel", so, I'm thirty two and sticking to it.

It's amazing how these months fly by - I don't know about you, but when I was young a year seemed to last forever....Great news about the vaccine's being around the corner....Will you take it? - I can't wait....the thought of playing live again is brill. We take everything for granted, it's when we lose things, we appreciate them....Going out to eat is something I have always enjoyed - Eating together around the dinner table is a simple process really but I love it.

As I've said many times, having music in my life has been a life saver.....I've called it a passion many times, and that's the key, I think.....As psychiatrists and psychologists say, 'The answer to life and well-being is being totally engaged in something', I've found that to be true. Those times when the brain is chattering and thoughts are coming and going and sensations are appearing and images are keeping us awake, we all need something to free us, and for me, music is the remedy. Five hours in the studio fly by. My son, Christian, is here most days; his studio is close to mine. He has had many interesting projects over the years.... Blazing Squad, 911, together we worked with Sada Vidoo [the doll from X Factor]. Recently, Christian and his partner in music, Arno Spires, have been writing with Alesha Dixon....I've heard some of the songs and they sound amazing....Alesha is a beautiful person and a big talent. Another great talent is Alex Hepburn. Christian wrote and produced an album for her in 2019....I was included on a few things - [Only in a limited way] - Recently, one of the songs Christian and Alex wrote has been taken and developed by Joyner Lucas. He has added an amazing rap to their song 'Things I Seen'. Three weeks ago, his album, 'Evolution', was number one in the U.S. Billboard Rap chart and, apparently, top five in twenty other countries. Christian and Alex are soon to start writing for her next album.

STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF RUSS

My mum and dad were sent to Liverpool to work for the war effort and they both loved Liverpool and the people of Merseyside. Dad promoted dances regularly in his time there. My brother, Roy, was born in Liverpool, in 1942. They said Roy had a heavy Scouse accent when they arrived back at Waltham Cross in 1944. They moved in to a small farm house in Eleanor Road, which was the next road to where dad was born and brought up. The house was pretty basic, had no electricity and no bathroom, however, we did have an outside toilet - [which never seemed to work very well]. The lighting throughout the house was by way of gas mantles. The bath, which was metal, was hung on the scullery door and put in front of the fire when in use. The best thing about this property was the fact that behind the back yard was one third of an acre field, where Mum and Dad kept three goats and about fifty chickens.

I was born in the front bedroom a few months after the war had finished. My earliest recollection was being in a pram outside the front door, when it started to rain and my mother came and pushed the pram back into the house. I don't know what age I was but I can't have been older than three. I recall playing in the yard - [being a farm it was a yard, not a garden].....Neighbours children came and played... the usual kids' games, often in the dirt, and Cowboys and Indians. Mum and Dad said that I was picking out tunes on the family piano before I started school. However, my first love was drums. I suppose I wanted to be like dad. I remember as I was banging around on a biscuit tin, Dad said, "This kid's got great rhythm". He took his drums out of the cases, set them up and let me smash the drums and cymbals - for me, it was better than being let loose in an ice cream parlour. The first music I remember hearing was classical, which mum played on the radiogram, 'Moonlight Sonata' by Beethoven was a favourite. I still love that pieceI remember it used to make me feel sad. Why? I never knew, until I learned it was written in a minor key. My mother had a good voice, in that high Jeanette Macdonald style - while dusting, she would sing 'Indian Love Call' or, 'Sweet Mystery of Life' - I don't know if it was a good voice but to me it sounded amazing.....

Well, I write some more next month.....Stay safe everyone. Take care. Loads of Love, Russ xxx

LOCKDOWN VIDEOS

Russ has, very kindly been making home videos for his Facebook page. Last month we had Time Machine. Carole made a special request and he came up with this classic and big hit.

<https://fb.watch/1Gy0wYbSj2/>

PODCASTS

Last month we had Part 1 of John (Mod) Rogan's podcast from Ian and Sven. They have been busy over there on the Voices group. Mod Part 2 came out in the middle of October and the next one, November but it was released on Russ's birthday, was with John Verity, who, as most of you will know, took over from Russ when he left Argent. You can find all the podcasts on Russ's website via the link below. Enjoy!

Russballardmusic.com/podcast.html

RUSS'S MUSIC HISTORY

By Dave Williams

Songs in the key of White

In their autobiography, Brian and Eddie Holland of the famous **Holland-Dozier-Holland** songwriting partnership at **Motown Records**, said they never visited Great Britain in their heyday, never having had reason to. When they eventually did fairly recently, people travelled miles to meet them. They couldn't understand the adulation, as back home in the States, nobody cares who wrote the hits, whereas here, music fans seem to be more aware of the names in small print below the song title on the record label. Russ alluded to this in his recent feature on **Mort Shuman**. This reminded me that we have a songwriter here who is very dear to our hearts and was responsible for many songs that Russ Ballard performed in the studio, on stage and on television. I refer to Christopher Taylor White, or as most of us know him, **Chris White**.



Along with **Rod Argent** and **Colin Blunstone**, Chris was a member of **The Zombies**, who achieved massive success with their first release **She's Not There**. Over the next three years, despite further hits in a number of countries, they began to struggle financially. After leaving Decca Records, they signed with CBS and went into **Abbey Road** to record a new 'self-produced' record, **Odessey and Oracle**, with the infamous spelling mistake. When one of the songs, **Time of the Season**, belatedly became a massive hit single, the LP would go on to achieve legendary status, but at the time of its release, the band had more or less come to an end. Whilst the other members left the music business, the two main writers in the band, **Rod Argent** and **Chris White**, started making plans to continue working together as songwriters and producers. I recently invited Chris to share some of his thoughts on his time working with the pair and to tell us about his recently launched CD compilation project.

DW) Welcome Chris. Thank you for agreeing to talk us at the newsletter.

CW) *Thank you for inviting me. I am a big fan of Russ so I'm happy to contribute.*

DW) In terms of Russ's career, your time working with him was comparatively short, but it was an important period during which he wrote some of his most celebrated songs including *Liar*, *God Gave Rock and Roll to You* and *I Don't Believe in Miracles*, all of which you co-produced. Inevitably the story starts with the final days of *The Zombies*. As the recording sessions for *Odessey and Oracle* were nearing an end, I gather the band had already decided to break up.

CW) *We didn't decide to quit the band that early. We thought **Odessey & Oracle** was our best work so far, but the first track out as a single, **Care Of Cell 44** I think it was, didn't catch on. I think **Time of The Season** was next and that got no reaction at all. Rod and I were writers, so we had some income, but the rest of the band really had no income. Our guitarist **Paul Atkinson** was getting married, so he had to get a job. It was at that point that we thought it was time to quit. Rod and I wanted to continue in music, writing and producing. Eight months later **Time of The Season** was a surprise hit, a welcome boost, but by then Rod and I were well into putting a new band together.*

DW) Was it always the plan that you would be an integral part of Rod's next band as a writer and producer rather than a performer?

CW) *Rod and I shared a flat at that time, along with **Terry Quirk**, the artist who designed the cover of **Odessey & Oracle**. We tried several different line-ups for Rod's vision, and he was working with a better bass player than me – his cousin **Jim Rodford**. I wanted to co-produce and write with Rod, so that was perfect for me. Rod made a generous offer to me, to put both our names on anything we wrote saying that just one hit song would keep us both, and the new band, going.*

DW) Jim was the first to join the new band and suggested **Bob Henrit** from **Unit 4 + 2** as the band's drummer. With Russ also being a member of **Unit 4 + 2**, presumably this explains how Russ came into the picture.

CW) *Jim had worked with Bob, so Rod and I went to secretly watch him perform at a **Unit 4 + 2** gig. Unfortunately, the venue was nearly empty, and we were spotted straight away. The band was great and when Bob said he was interested in joining us, he suggested Russ as a guitarist and singer. Looking back, it seems such an obvious choice now! It was also Bob who suggested calling the band ' **Argent**'. Rod was not keen on the idea, but we adopted it in the end.*

DW) Some of the early demos by **Argent** were used on a final **Zombies** album called **R.I.P.** What's the story behind the release of **R.I.P.**?

CW) *CBS held us to the contract for another album. There was no real hope of getting the **Zombies** back for a tour as everyone else was doing something new. We thought we would reactivate some old unfinished tracks we had recorded a while back on 4 track, with all the original **Zombies**, and add some more recordings to those. We now had access to 8-track recording, whereas all our previous recordings were on 4-track. We also added some orchestras to some of the tracks. Our old recording engineer, **Gus Dudgeon**, offered to engineer the*

*album, forgoing his then role as a successful producer. We also wanted to use **Bob, Jim and Russ** on the newer songs. It was a good way to ‘work’ the band in.*

DW) The belated success of *Time of the Season* presumably played a part in *Colin Blunstone* returning to the music business. After achieving a little success under the name *Neil MacArthur*, I gather it was you that persuaded him to take up a full-time solo career under his real name.

CW) *I took **Colin** along to a rehearsal of **Argent**. He was knocked out by it. Rod and I had a production deal with **CBS** in America, so we convinced him to try recording an album with us. By then he could use his own name, as the contractual obligation with Decca had ended.*

DW) ***Argent** and **Colin Blunstone** presumably provided a perfect vehicle for establishing your career as a producer as well as a writer. **Argent** members often acted as session players for other acts you produced, *Michael Fennelly* for example. How did you manage this incredible workload?*

CW) *When you love music, it’s not hard to enjoy what you do. I was lucky to work with some really good musicians. It was a pleasure to do all that work. Someone once said “If you do you something that you enjoy, you’ll never do a day’s ‘work’ in your life”*

DW) How exciting was it watching *Argent* come together? How quickly did *Russ* find his feet as a writer within the band?

CW) ***Russ** was already an accomplished songwriter when we met him. Rod, myself and **Russ** made a good team – we all had different skills and styles. It’s good to bounce off such people and get their views and ideas about your own writing.*

DW) *The **Zombies** often used to write songs at Rod’s parents’ house, gathered round the piano. Can you describe **Argent**’s writing process?*

CW) *We usually played over new songs at rehearsal. That was mostly before we had the ability to record demos first. With such good musicians, they could add ideas to the new songs.*

DW) Presuming you didn’t travel with them, how did you spend your time whilst *Argent* were on the road? Was it during these periods that you concentrated on writing and producing other artists? I remember buying an excellent record by *Limey* called *Silver Eagle*, which you produced. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iY9fyuwSMY8>

CW) Actually I did travel with **Argent** at the start, especially in America. Later I concentrated on writing and producing other artists. **Limey** had some great musicians. It was a pleasure working with them.



L to R: Limey's Silver Eagle LP and single were both produced by Chris White, and the sleeve of Argent's LP All Together Now

DW) What made **Argent** a real treasure was the contrast between the songs by **Argent / White** and **Russ Ballard**. The combination of songs worked well. From the second album onwards, it appears that there was a roughly 50/50 split of songs by the two sets of writers. Was this a conscious decision or was it just the way things worked out? Did you try to strike a balance between shorter commercially appealing songs and the longer instrumental workouts?

CW) *We just chose the best songs. There was no conscious decision making except 'Is that a song we want to record?' Then a joint decision. No other rules.*

DW) Two songs you wrote for *Argent* were the band's signature hit *Hold Your Head Up* and the song *Candles in the River* on the *In Deep* album. As coproducer of all of their albums, do you have a particular favourite?

CW) *My favourite changes every day.*

DW) A trivial question. Your picture featured on the front cover of *All Together Now*. As the unofficial 5th member of *Argent*, if invited, would you have taken to the swimming pool for the *In Deep* sleeve photo?

CW) *I wasn't at the photo session, but I would have entered into the spirit, but I wasn't a member of the band!*

DW) As *Argent* continued to grow as musicians, it became clear that *Rod* and *Russ* were heading in different directions and eventually *Russ* made the decision to leave. When *Argent* re-emerged with a new line-up, you continued to co-produce, though you withdrew from writing.

CW) *I didn't feel that I was contributing enough to the writing anymore. Anything that I was writing at the time wasn't suitable for the band at that time. I grew a bit tired of 'prog rock' and large venues. I missed the excitement of smaller gigs and the energy. **Bruce Springsteen** saved my life really. I was taken along to see him when I lived in Spain, not expecting much, but stood up for 3 hours at the venue and lost my voice! He restored my faith in entertainment and rock!*

DW) *Jim Rodford* wrote two songs, *Trapeze* and *Time*, which featured on *Circus* and *Counterpoints* respectively. I always sensed there was a side of Jim that we never saw. I imagine he was not only a great bass player but also a multi-instrumentalist and probably wrote a few songs that never saw the light of day. I can certainly imagine him playing a big part in arranging songs in the studio. Would you say that is a reasonable assessment?

CW) *Jim was a great bass player, and a really good workman. I miss him a lot – he had lots of ideas. Yes, that is a good assessment!*

DW) *Counterpoints* would turn out to be the final album by *Argent* and brought your association with the band to an end. You were with them from the beginning to the end. Would you say it ended in much the same way as *The Zombies*?

CW) ***Argent** ran out of steam really. Again, it was mostly financial.*

DW) *John Verity* is flying high on the blues scene. Sadly, we'll never know what heights the late *John Grimaldi* might have reached.

CW) *John Grimaldi* wrote some fine songs, but we'll never know how he would have developed. The thing I remember about that line-up is a great gig they did at the Roundhouse for the release of *Circus*, which we recorded, and it got terrible reviews. We found out later that the areas set aside for the reviewers from the music press, was over-run by the audience, so those 'pissed-off reviewers' collectively decided to slag the gig off – they never even went in and watched the gig!

DW) I believe the song *Well, Well, Well* on Rod's 1978 *Moving Home* solo album relates to that incident.

For the anniversary *Odessey and Oracle* concerts, I gather it was you and *Hugh Grundy* that came up with the idea. Was it difficult going back on the road after so many years away? Did you enjoy the experience?

CW) Rod thought it might be a good idea to have the 'premiere' of *Odessey and Oracle*. We had never played the album in its entirety before, so Hugh and I rehearsed the album together for a couple of months so that when we went through the songs at Rod's house with Colin and Rod, we knew the songs inside out! Better than Rod and Colin! Being on stage I always feel I am 25 years old, playing with my old friends.

DW) Russ has his iconic holey *Fender Strat* guitar but you have an interesting one too. Eagle eyed fans will have noticed that your bass guitar has some wording painted on it, very similar to one *Jim Rodford* used to play in the 1970s. I argue that they are not the same guitar, as Jim's was clearly a Fender but yours has a different headstock on the neck. Also, unless I am mistaken, the wording is slightly different.

CW) About Jim's bass, you are correct. When *Argent* started, I 'gave' my Fender bass to Jim. He then stripped it later and used it as a fretless bass. When *the Zombies* got together for a reunion, I bought a Yamaha bass and asked *Terry Quirk* (the designer of several *Zombies* album covers) to write the words 'Piano' (as he painted the original Fender bass for me) on to the new bass - but our memories let us down so it didn't say exactly the same - I hadn't realised until you just pointed the difference out!

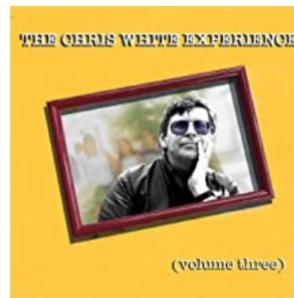


L to R; Spot the difference. Jim Rodford pictured playing Chris's old Fender bass and Chris using his recently purchased Yamaha bass

DW) In 2007 you recorded an album called *The Key* under the name *White Circle*, a family effort featuring your wife *Vivienne* and your son *Matthew*. I believe both of your sons, the other being *Jamie*, are in the music business.

CW) We added to, and remixed, some tracks on *The Key* and released it as an album by *Bianca Kinane* called *Passion Has Dreams*. My wife, *Vivienne Boucherat*, has toured with us on stage and is great vocalist and writer. She was also with the prize-winning choir *The London Bulgarian Choir*. *Matthew* worked as a recording engineer and my other son *Jamie* (a.k.a. *JJ White*) had his own band, which toured with the touring *Zombies* in the USA, and has also (reluctantly) worked in advertising.

DW) You have recently launched a series of CDs under the title *The Chris White Experience*. I have to say there is some real treasure contained within the four volumes issued so far, many featuring *Russ* and other members of *Argent*. What prompted you to release these gems and are any more volumes planned for the future?



CW) **Matthew** and **Jamie** found hundreds of my old tapes in an attic and we thought it would be great to release several unreleased song demos. They have released 4 volumes so far. We think there will be at least 8 of those along with several Production CDs and other productions I have done since the 70's. We have also formed a publishing company. The boys are also specialising in archiving recordings and restoring and registering historic catalogues. There are no other people doing what they do.

DW) Final question **Chris**. Just like *Russ* and *Rod*, you have had your songs covered by other notable artists, including *Beautiful South*, *Vanessa Paradis*, *Susanna Hoffs* and *The Foo Fighters*. Of all the songs you have written, do you have a personal favourite? For me, I love *Hold Your Head Up* and *This Will Be Our Year*, but my favourite *Chris White* song without a shadow of a doubt is *Butcher's Tale (Western Front 1914)*. The lyrics are so moving and the use of the vintage pedal organ so haunting. It always commands my undivided attention from beginning to end.

CW) Those three are favourites but I would choose **You Make Me Feel Good**, the B side of **She's Not There**, because it was recorded with *She's Not There* on our first recording session! Point of interest, **Butcher's Tale** was originally sub-titled *Western Front 1916*, which was the year of the Battle of the Somme, but some record company 'person' thought it was wrong so re-titled it as 1914! We didn't notice until it was too late.

Postscript:

Information on the **Chris White Experience** CDs and how to purchase them, can be found by visiting <https://www.thechriswhiteexperience.com>

Video link to **Vanessa Paradis** performing **Chris's** song **This Will Be Our Year**. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcWPNRXY5Zo&list=RDDcWPNRXY5Zo&start_radio=1

DAVE'S COVER QUEST

One for our Dutch readers this month. **The Cats** originate from **Volendam** and had a long and successful career in Holland and Germany. One of their members is called **Arnold Muhren**. Those who are long in the tooth like me might recall that **Ipswich Town FC** years ago had a player in their team of that very same

name, who was also born in **Volemdam**. I thought I would just throw that one into the mix.

No.28



She's So In Love by The Cats

This month's 'quest' was released in 1985 by Dutch group **The Cats** and reached No.31 in the Netherlands Top 40. Consisting of **Cees Veerman**, **Piet Veerman**, **Arnold Mühren**, **Jaap Schilder**, **Theo Klouwer** and (from 1972 to 1975) **Piet Keize**, they were active from 1964 and 1985 apart from a brief separation between 1979 and 1982. They developed an original sound that was named eel sound, characterized by the drama in the voice of **Piet Veerman**. During their time together they released a considerable catalogue of songs and found success in their home country and Germany. They are best known for their hit **One-Way Wind**.



She's So in Love, written by **Russ**, arrived in 1985 so it was one of their final recordings. See if you can spot a slight resemblance to a song off Russ's album **Into the Fire**. No prizes though. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYnifTcS0o0>



[the cats she's so in love](#)

the cats she's so in love

www.youtube.com

The band re-united in 2006 to record two new songs.