



(Header by Sven Kramer)

FEBRUARY 2021

Welcome to our new readers.

This February newsletter marks the end of our eighth year of **Russ Ballard News**. What is more, we are finding more and more to report. We know that Russ has no intention of slowing down so, from next month, here we go into year nine. Now, having said we have plenty to report, it has been quite a slow news month, but we do have our own super sleuth who has discovered a few very interesting things for us. Many thanks to Dave Williams for this and all his work for the newsletter and thanks to Greg Zimmermann for his contribution to this month's edition.

Best wishes

Sue

THIS MONTH FROM RUSS

*Hello Everybody and Welcome to new friends,
I don't know about you but after weeks of negative news, virus variants, the dark wintery weather recently, now the freezing cold, I can feel a change in the air. The daffs are showing out of the ground, the lighter, longer days are coming, and the promise of spring is everywhere.... don't you love it!! Oh, Magic! The promise of Spring, longer, warmer days, blossom on the trees and then, 'Summer'.... I guess the insecurity of a changing pandemic is always there but it seems we're doing well in the vaccination area and that's positive - let's hope we can convince the rest of the world to follow suit. I'm sure we'll be dining out, shopping on the high street and the malls again, and there's sure to be surprises that will be coming our way.... it's said that 'Necessity is the mother of invention' and, as life develops what it demands, I'm sure Scientists will have new viruses in their sights and will invent whatever we need, as they have with the Flu. Also, it'll be good when we can all get together at gigs.... I guess for a time the venues will insist on social distancing, that makes sense for these times - it won't be forever, I'm sure.... However, I look forward to seeing you there. I wish you well.... Love, Russ*

PODCASTS

Part 1 of the podcast Sven and Ian did with Russ for The Voices group on Facebook came online on Christmas Eve. Part 2 was delayed because of our sad news at New Year but it came online on Valentine's Day. Listen out for a brand new track from Russ, recorded in lockdown. You can find both the podcasts on Russ's website here... <https://www.russballardmusic.com/podcast.html> If you haven't heard Pete Thorp's podcast yet, you can find that there too.



RUSS'S MUSIC HISTORY

By Dave Williams

Two articles this month that feature coverage of two of Russ Ballard's most famous songs.

Cecilia Nedgård - The Lady in Red

Whilst putting together the Annual Festive Quiz just before Christmas, I was trying to track down a video clip of the orchestral version of **Since You Been Gone**. In the end I discovered three different orchestras had recorded the song. It did not end there. I also spotted a couple of videos of choirs performing their own interpretations of this famous Russ Ballard song, one of which stood out in particular. This was a performance of the song by the **Unisoul Music Vocal Choir**, who hail from Sweden. I posted a link to this on Facebook and it attracted some positive comments and gained a lot of "likes". For those subscribers who've not seen it, here is the link to the clip on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXMieQtJC9g> .

In actual fact, there are two versions, but this was the version I posted on Facebook. What impressed me was the feelgood factor, everybody giving it their all, not least the lady in red conducting the proceedings. Everyone clearly having fun.

I was interested to know a little bit more about the background to this performance, and after discovering that **Unisoul Music** is the brainchild of **Cecilia Nedgård**, the conductor in the video clip, I

contacted her to see if she would be willing to share some information on her work. Cecilia was only too happy to participate.



Photo: William Sjögren Gomez

DW) Hi Cecilia, thank you for agreeing to talk to us here at the Russ Ballard Official Newsletter. Can I start by asking what inspired you to start a choir?

CN) I've been singing all my life and I've been teaching singing all my adult life, so it's my instrument that I cannot live without playing. When I started my company and chose singing teaching as a full-time profession, I had to come up with a way to teach singing technique to a large number of people at the same time. A choir was then a natural choice. This was 2006. At that time there were almost no pop and rock choirs in Stockholm and all existing choirs had singing tests and required that you could read sheet music. Therefore, I wanted to start a choir for everyone, without tests or requirements for prior knowledge, where my job was to teach them to sing. And so, the **Unisoul Vocal Choir** was created, singing lessons in choral format.

DW) I see from one or two of your videos that you have a great voice. Did you have a singing career in the past?

CN) Thanks! Well, I have performed and released a few songs on my own, but I have never played in the big leagues. In my youth I wanted to be a great singer, but I was not brave enough or did not know how to achieve it I guess. Today I am happy to just be able to sing and continue to develop my voice. But if someone asked me to come and record or perform, I would not say no.

DW) One of the songs you chose to cover is Rainbow's Since You Been Gone. This song was written by Russ Ballard in 1976 and has been covered by many artists besides Rainbow including Brian May, Michael Ball and even three different orchestras have recorded it. It was therefore interesting to see the song tackled by a choir. What made you choose this song?

CN) Well, at the time I selected this song I actually let my students suggest songs and then I chose the best ones.

DW) What qualities do you look for in choosing a song for your choir?

CN) It's good if it's a hit song that many people like. It must be fun to sing, not just nice to listen to, because we will spend a lot of time practicing it. It's preferable if it's an up-tempo song. I have to take into account the feeling the music creates in the rehearsal room, and for that reason we only sing one ballad per semester. The song must also contain harmony as I don't do the arrangements myself (you have to have legal permits that I don't have time to wait for). It must also be at a good level and in a key that suits my students. I also have to consider the mix of music styles as well as new and old songs to get as interesting a mix as possible. I also never choose a song that I myself don't like. So, choosing a song is a difficult task.

DW) How long does it take to finish a typical song when you have harmonies and up to 50 or 60 singers involved?

CN) It depends on whether the students have heard the song before, how much harmony there is and how difficult the song is. If we have more singers, it goes faster. We spend about 4 hours per song to learn it by heart, which includes practicing singing technique on it. Students can practice between rehearsals themselves if they wish, but it is not compulsory.

DW) Do you ever take a choir 'on the road' for public performances?

CN) We have had public concerts twice a year that I have arranged but we have not been on tour. However, we are sometimes engaged by companies and have sung in shopping malls, in theatres and even a few times on TV!

DW) It is said that singing is great for relieving stress. Would you agree with this and can you explain the benefits?

CN) Absolutely. Singing is good for both physical and mental health. I'm not a scientist but there are many substances that are released when you sing. Among them is dopamine which makes us feel calm. Singing is much more physical than people think, and you achieve the same effect as from other forms of exercise. Another aspect is that we control our breathing when we sing. If we breathe deeply and slowly, the whole-body system calms down.

DW) I see that you offer singing tuition including online lessons. Has this been affected by the pandemic?

CN) In the beginning, when the pandemic struck, my family and I isolated ourselves and I only taught through Zoom. With our 2-year-old daughter kept at home from preschool, it was a challenge to work at the same time. In the autumn of 2020, on the other hand, I have had more singing students than ever before. There are five reasons for this:

- I teach a lot through Zoom and it makes it possible to teach all over the country and abroad.
- My wonderful choir has a break due to the pandemic, so I have more time to give private singing lessons.
- As the pandemic drags on, several students reason that it is better to take singing lessons via Zoom than none at all and both they and I have been positively surprised at how well it has worked. Many of my students today even prefer lessons via Zoom because it saves time.
- Many people work from home now and can take a lesson during the day.
- People long to meet other people and do something fun but in a safe way (I have introduced a number of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19).

The pandemic has also forced people to develop their technical skills, which has been beneficial to me. I released my first version of Singing Lessons Online in 2008 but it is only now that it has become more popular.

DW) Do you get interest from countries outside of Sweden?

CN) I have gotten people from all over the world to take my online courses. But I have focused on marketing the new version that was released in 2019 for people and choirs in Sweden to begin with. So far, I have only given my Zoom lessons to Swedes (in the country or abroad). But I speak English, so everyone is welcome!

DW) Thank you Cecilia for providing a great insight into your work. It's particularly nice to see a profession that can prosper during a pandemic, particularly when it provides health and well-being benefits at a time when so many people are suffering psychological and mental stress from lockdown. Incidentally, **Russ Ballard** has had a few songs covered by Swedish artists, most notably the two girls from **Abba**. **Frida** had a hit record with **(I Know) There's Something Going On** and **Agnetha** recorded a couple of his songs, the most notable one being **Can't Shake Loose**. They both have that same up-tempo feel of *Since You Been Gone*. However, perhaps the most perfect Russ Ballard song for a choir to sing would be **God Gave Rock and Roll To You**, which was a hit worldwide for Argent and later Kiss. That would be awesome.



Photos: Maria Nedgård

For those who are interested, there are many video clips of the vocal choir on the **Unisoul Music** YouTube channel. I mentioned that Cecilia has a great voice, and here is a video featuring her fronting her choir with a powerful vocal performance of Sam Brown's **Stop**.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ts3P4_Pkho

If you are interested in some online singing lessons, or you are looking for a new interest to pass away the time during lockdown, details of Cecilia's online singing courses can be found on her website at <https://unisoulmusic.se/>. The language is Swedish but If you select the **Sanglektioner** online tab, a box pops up at the top of the screen offering you the option of a translated version.

Alternatively, there is also an English version of the Online Courses that can be reached here: <https://singinglessons.thinkific.com/>. If anyone is interested in private lessons through Zoom, they can obtain details by sending an email to info@unisoulmusic.se.

OTHER NEWS

Covid-19 continues to adversely affect professional musicians, but two members of Russ's 1976 band have turned Lockdown to their advantage and used downtime to create some new music.

First is guitarist **Bill Roberts**. Under the stage name **Billy Hammond**, **Long Live Rock and Roll** is Bill's first solo album. Released by **CJRO Records** and available on all the major download sites, all the songs on the album were written or co-written by Bill. He also played all the instruments, sang all vocals, and engineered and mixed the recordings.



Left: Long Live Rock & Roll by Billy Hammond a.k.a. Bill Roberts. Right: Sunnyside Up by Tony Lester

Meanwhile former bass guitarist **Tony Lester** has also been busy recording and posted two new songs on his Facebook page. One is called **Rabbit Hole** and the other is a song co-written with his former colleague in **Smooth Loser**, guitarist **Chris Gibbons**. This is titled **Sunnyside Up**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tv9clk1M_hA&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR383KxYdzjF8tU8rYwTA0cS9_8o8XPVV-1kHHiZRLUwJBqSbrQF6uOuc7k

According to notes accompanying the clip, there may be more to come from Tony and Chris in the future. Meanwhile drummer Alan Wickett from the same line-up, has now been added to the band members section of Russ's website. Alan is raring to get back on the road with his swing orchestra.

RETRO ARTICLE

Here is an interesting Roulettes article found by Greg Zimmermann. It was written by Bob Henrit in 1983. Hopefully you will be able to zoom in on your computer screen to magnify the text.

RUSS, BOB, PETE & MOD

10/65

L.P. "Stakes And Chips"

Bad Time/What You Go
Find Out The Truth/I'll
Stubborn Kind Of Fellow
I Can't Think Of Anyon
Mebody/This Little Girl.

The Roulettes recording career spanned the years between 1962 and 1967. Only Peter Thorpe and myself were involved with the first one which was La Bamba, but not the Richie Valens version. It should be appreciated that The Roulettes were not a collection of spotty-faced musicians from the same neighbourhood, we were a collection of acne-sufferers from different neighbourhoods. Russ Ballard and I had been in groups together since the late fifties but he didn't join 'The Team' until quite some time after I did.

No, we Roulettes were formed as a backing group for Adam Faith to replace John Barry's Seven. Thus I was hired as a drummer, and the others were hired as bassists and guitarists. On thinking about this point I find that in John Rogan's case he was hired as singer, guitarist, bass player, drummer, trumpeter, dancer and ventriloquist since he assured us that he could do all of these things! During our 'all-round-entertainer' phase, when we scintillated in Summer Season(s), he proved that he certainly could sing, and his dancing was 'head and shoulders' above the rest of us. To be honest though this was no particular feat!

Thorpey and I were the only latter-day Roulettes who had actually been in Pantomime. We were with Adam Faith at Bournemouth in 1962 and played Chinese policemen, Emperor's guards and the like to his Aladdin. It was six days a week, great fun, and undoubtedly contributed greatly to our musical careers. After all, it's but a short step from The Pier Pavilion Bridlington to Carnegie Hall. All we had to do was practice!

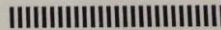
Of course it was great fun being in The Roulettes and what with making records with Adam, and records by ourselves, we found ourselves appearing on T.V. what seemed like once a week to plug our latest waxing. Our only problem at this time was finding out when we would be recording, and what. In that order! In those halcyon days one or other of us would get a phone call from John Burgess, our A and R man at E.M.I. to inform us that we had a session booked at Abbey Road in the very near future. Did we have anything to record? Often we had something in mind, but if we hadn't he would invariably have a great song for us. We would receive the demo, or the master if we were doing a cover, and get to work on it. (I don't believe we ever considered whether or not these songs suited us; invariably we made them fit our style.)

Eventually we would present ourselves at Abbey Road — firstly in Studio 2, and ultimately in the so-called Beatles Studio 3 which had been built since we had signed with E.M.I. It actually had four tracks to record on. At this time we always arrived at the studio for a 10.30 start, and it wasn't until the end of our time there, years later, that we discovered that sessions always began at 10 o'clock! We had

been cutting down our already ridiculously short recording time by more than 15%. We were expected to record two sides in three hours and they would be mixed 'in our absentia' immediately afterwards. At the time it didn't seem particularly difficult to cram everything into three hours, but it has to be considered that The Beatles had recorded the whole of their first album in a day!

A year or so into our E.M.I. contract we were invited to help out some friends from my home town who were making their first record. We duly went along to a studio behind Marble Arch for a session which was to make waves around the World. The song was 'Concrete and Clay' written by Brian Parker, who for one week had been the guitarist with The Roulettes. Prior to that he had been the leader of The Hunters who had also included two other old Roulettes: Henry Stracey and John Rogers. (John was the original bassist who was killed on the Great North Road in May '63 on his way to a gig. He was instrumental in getting me to play on a Hunters record called The Storm while I was still at school.) But I digress. The Roulettes played on all the records released by Unit Four Plus Two, including a couple of decidedly nerve-wracking orchestral ones.

After a year ('67) in France with Richard Anthony we decided to call it a day, and Russell and I actually joined 'Unit Four' for a while before we went on to form Argent. But that, as they say, is another story.



BOB HENRIT-ROULETTE-June 1983

