



(Header by Sven)

July 2022

Just a reminder that Russ's "social media" is this newsletter

(russ.b.news@hotmail.co.uk),

his website (<https://russballardmusic.com>),

his Official Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/RussBallardMusicOfficial>),

his Facebook Group, Voices of Russ Ballard, (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/562129657792892>)

and his Official Instagram page, (<https://www.instagram.com/russballardmusicofficial/>).

If you see his name anywhere else on one of the social media platforms, it is either a fan page/group or another Russ Ballard completely.

One of our readers recently suggested that we have a monthly Q&A. A brilliant idea and we have had this feature since the newsletter started in 2013. If we don't have a question in the newsletter, it is because no one has sent one in. I have been a bit lax in reminding you and appealing for questions. So, have a think...what would you like to ask Russ? About his work and career, that is! It can be obscure, technical, the meaning of a

song, the way he writes, whatever. I can guarantee there will be other readers who will be interested, whatever it is. It doesn't matter if it has been asked before. We are constantly getting new readers who won't have seen it previously. Send it to this email address.

Best wishes
Sue

THIS MONTH FROM RUSS

I used to keep a diary many years ago - I stopped, because I thought it wasn't a wise thing looking back at the past, however, it's probably a handy thing to have when preparing a newsletter. I now tend to look at the calendar, messages or emails to prompt my recollections. I see, recently, there are quite a few from Michael Angel....What a great name! - I first became aware of him on Facebook. I saw a video of his group, 'Fugitive', performing in the studio....It was a song called 'Raised on Rock'....I thought they sounded great - I saw Michael Angel's phone number and called him.....it's something I don't normally do, anyway, we had a good chat, he told me the band come from Liverpool and they've been together a few years - it was a good conversation.

We discussed the song, he asked what I thought and I told him it was good but there were some ideas I would have added that might have suited. He sounded a good man and we arranged to spend a day writing, which has turned into about twenty days...but loads of fun. Mike came here with his guitar player, 'Ranko', [his actual name is Paul]. They arrived on a Sunday six weeks ago, stayed at the local Premier Inn. Over an Indian meal, we discussed music, songs, being on the road, writing. Mike had some great stories about his life, some tragic, some funny, some, 'tragically funny'...I said, 'You could turn those stories in to songs' So...that's what we've been doing. Dave, their brilliant bass player, came down and added bass on the songs along with Ranko, who's also an amazing player. The two songs we've completed are sounding brill and Christian's monitor mixes sound fab.

We've had so many laughs whilst being together, I asked the guys if they would do a Podcast with Ian Street and Sven Kramer....[They have an online podcast....The Voices of RB]. They do say all Liverpoolians are comics....there's some truth there.....I'll keep you updated.

What other things have happened this month? 'Stencil Pencils' have been touring, playing lots of shows and Festivals and their song 'Young and in Love' is being played on rotation at Milton Keynes Radio....It's a great track. And, we received some good news about a song, Lighthouse, that Christian and I wrote with co-writers, Ricky Hanley and Andreas Stone....With a band called SHINee, with vocalist Onew, it has gone straight into the Japanese chart at number 2 and sold 48,000 copies in two days. <https://youtu.be/ixe7emZZyB0> Also, Christian has a hit in the "Soulful House Chart", with "Till You Come Back", number 8 this week. It's always a good feeling.

RUSS - LIFE STORIES

The developing story of our group, Buster Meikle and The Daybreakers... in 1961/62. We were playing gigs regularly around East Hertfordshire, then occasionally, we'd be approached by venues from London and one was Brady Youth Club in Bow. One Sunday evening in between 'sets' somebody told us Helen Shapiro was in the audience. Helen was a fourteen year old who was the number one girl singer at the time. She had recently had a big hit with a song called 'Don't Treat Me Like A Child'. This particular week she was number one with a ballad titled 'You Don't Know'. She came on the stage and sang with us - "What song do you want to sing", we asked. "Sweet Nuthin's" she said. Perfect, it was one we knew. Helen had a very big voice and the crowd liked her. We sat and chatted for a while and she said, "I'll tell my producer about your group".. Her producer was Norrie Paramour, who was also Cliff Richard and The Shadows producer. True to her word she told him and a few weeks later we found ourselves being auditioned, at his house in Hampstead....."I like the group", he said, "Come in to Abbey Road Studios, I'll do a sound test"- it all sounded very big time to me but exciting. He sent us two songs to prepare for the test. One was an American song written by two writers called Tepper and Bennet and titled 'YoYo Boy', the other, a song by Ian Samwell called "You Tell The Sweetest Lies". They were average songs, "Yo Yo Boy" was too close to "Rubber Ball" for my liking - however, I wasn't complaining because it seemed we were getting somewhere.....Even then, Abbey Road was the most famous studio in London and it felt amazing being in that building and because I was

an enthusiast, I knew the engineer on the session from seeing his photo in magazines. It was Malcolm Addy, who was also at the controls of Cliff Richard and The Shadows sessions. We even made the recording in the number two studio where Cliff, The Shadows and Adam Faith recorded. Adam was Cliff's biggest rival at the time after having three consecutive number ones. We finished within three hours then sat with Norrie.....He suggested we find two better songs...We were fine with that.... things seemed to be developing well.

More next monthI wish you all well.....Happy Holidays .

<https://youtu.be/5l2cG-ed6hw>



[HELEN SHAPIRO - YOU DON'T KNOW](https://youtu.be/5l2cG-ed6hw)

HELEN SHAPIRO SINGING "YOU DONT KN
[youtu.be](https://youtu.be/5l2cG-ed6hw)

NEW WEBSITE

The link to the website is at the top of this newsletter. Try clicking on it and you will see that Sven has been very busy building a swish new website. This will enable us to use it for more things. All the favourite content is still there but it looks somewhat different. Have a look and tell us what you think.

THE NEXT GIG

Russ is playing at this indoor festival in Belgium on the Saturday, 20th August.
(Wrong date given last month - sorry!)



QUESTION OF THE MONTH

A question that has been going around in my head for quite some time now: What was the inspiration behind "René Didn't Do It"? It's certainly no run-of-the-mill lyric. The narrator vouches for this character, René, saying that "he was here with me" and therefore couldn't possibly be a suspect in a murder that took place somewhere else. Is there a story behind this that Russ would like to share?

Russ: 'Rene?' It's actually quite simple - The inspiration was an episode of Hawaii 5/O, or one of those detective series....Basically, Cops and Robbers. I guess when you look at it, 'Mack The Knife' is a similar idea. In my head, Rene is my friend and we were together, at my place, and we were watching TV. Rene is a bad boy and sometimes he don't do what he should and he's also been seen with the daughter of sergeant Jones....So obviously, sergeant Jones didn't like that, and, chose to frame Rene for a murder he didn't commit.

READER'S VIDEO

From Michele Turner

Enjoy this Argent video from 1973.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5fYPz8dKbg>



Argent Hold Your Head Up 1973 The Midnight Special - YouTube

*This is Argent live on the American TV
show - The Midnight Special*

www.youtube.com

RUSS'S MUSIC HISTORY

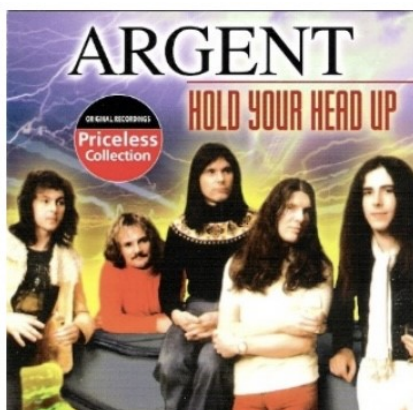
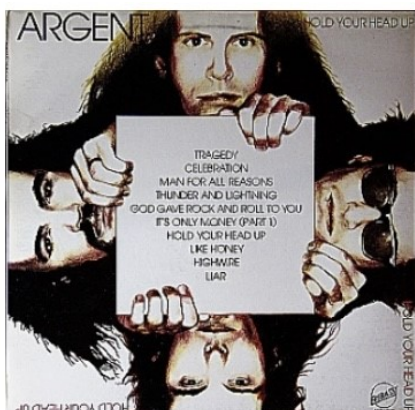
By Dave Williams

Another Year, Another 'Best of' Argent Compilation



Hold Your Head Up – The Best of Argent (2022) Edsel Records EDSL0104

What is the thinking behind yet another release of a compilation of Argent's best bits? An opportunity to cash in on Russ's recent return to the stage, or maybe just another attempt by Sony Records to earn some additional money by re-issuing some of their back catalogue. I've no real problem with these re-issues other than, in most cases, the band members, writers and performers, don't see a penny of the money that's generated. Before any executives come towards me wagging an angry finger, I should state that I don't know if that's the case with this latest release. What I can say is that this is actually the fourth compilation named after their 1971 Top 5 UK / US hit, previous titles having been released in 1978, 2000 and 2002.



Previous Hold Your Head Up compilations from 1978 (Embassy), 2000 (Sony Collectibles), 2002 (Epic Records)

On the positive side, anything that helps to keep a presence of Argent on the shelves of our record stores some 50 years after they were at their most popular, has to be a good thing, albeit there are very few record stores left nowadays. The only negative is that the new 2CD set under review here, sits next to another Argent hits compilation from 2010 called God Gave Rock and Roll to You, which is still widely available.



God Gave Rock and Roll to You (Sony Camden) 2010

So, how does this 2022 compilation shape up? The sleeve artwork is monochrome, and despite the lack of colour, it looks quite classy, with some nice photos of the 'classic' line-up. Where it does fall down is the running order of the songs. Each CD contains 14 songs, so 28 in total, which represents pretty good value. CD1 begins with the title track, but inexplicably, rather than saving their other best-known song, God Gave Rock and Roll to You, for CD2, it follows directly after Hold Your Head Up. An odd decision if ever there was one. Just as confusing is the fact that four tracks by the later post-Ballard line-up are included from the Circus album. That in itself isn't an issue, but the John Verity / John Grimaldi version of Argent played a different type of music to the Russ Ballard

incarnation, so personally I'd have held these songs towards the end of CD2, rather than dropping them in between songs from the early line-up. Does it work? I haven't listened, but I have my doubts. Having said that, I'm very pleased that space was found for some songs by the Mk II line-up, because a lot of Argent fans, myself included, enjoyed the **Circus** and **Counterpoints** albums immensely and were quite disappointed that the line-up was so short-lived.

Picking the "best of" an artist's catalogue for a compilation is very subjective. One glaring absentee is surely the Rod Argent / Chris White song **I Am the Dance of Ages**, from the **All Together Now** LP. Many readers might have seen a recent discussion on Facebook where Russ suggested that this song should have been the follow-up to **Hold Your Head Up**, rather than his own song **Tragedy**. I love the latter and disagreed, pointing out to Russ that Dance of Ages might have been a great single for Shirley Bassey. Russ responded by agreeing and congratulating me for having a good musical ear. Sadly, it wasn't me who came up with the idea, credit due to one of the many Argent fans I've corresponded with over the years. Both myself and Russ ate in total agreement. Could it ever happen I wonder? Wouldn't it be great to see an Argent classic featured on a 'Diamonds are Forever' compilation in the record stores in years to come!

AMATEUR HOUR

By Dave Williams

Amateur Hour is an occasional feature where we take the opportunity to highlight cover versions of songs written by Russ that have not, as far as we are aware, been given an official release. The feature was inspired by the discovery of a video by the **Unisoul Choir** with their rendition of **Since You Been Gone**. Since then, we've featured three more of Russ's songs, **Liar** (Alexander Rastopchin), **Voices** (Stefano Campi) and **New York Groove** (David Fishel). This month we are able to introduce a cover version of another of Russ's songs, possibly his best known, **God Gave Rock and Roll to You**, by the 'Viking Melodic Rock' band **Cygnus**. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WiBnUuqVr4Y>



[Cygnus - God Gave Rock And To You \(Argent\) \(Cover\) Viking Metal Friday #18](#)

Do you want to join the Count Zero Records family? Submit YOUR demo to us at <https://demosubmission.com> !🎧 Support on all platforms: <https://CountZeroRecord...www.youtube.com>

Cygnus are a 5-piece band, which includes Deneb on bass and vocal, Ruxx on drums and vocal, Blu on guitars and Rene Almaguer on keyboards. I discovered them via a You Tube channel belonging to **Count Zero Records**, an artist-run fully independent international full-service record label founded in Croatia in 2018.

God Gave Rock and Roll To You is just one of many rock songs that **Cygnus** have covered, as you can see by visiting their You Tube video page <https://www.youtube.com/c/CygnusOfficial/videos> . Their cover of God Gave Rock and Roll to You is based on the Kiss version, though they do at least recognise and acknowledge that the original version was released by **Argent**, which is a pleasant change!

Cygnus also write and record their own songs, and if **Raise Your Hands** is anything to go by, they are an outstanding talent. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuDyjkI_sw . They have released a few albums of original material, which are available through Amazon Music, Spotify, Apple Music etc, the latest of which is **Ancient Visions**, so whilst they may not be amateurs, I don't think these classic rock covers will be available as actual releases.

Doubtless there's a lot more to discover about Cygnus, should anyone wish to study them further.

DAVE'S COVER QUEST

Last month we featured Santana's Nowhere to Run as my chosen cover. Shortly after publication of the newsletter, news came through that Carlos Santana collapsed on stage at a show at Pine Knob Music Theatre in Clarkston, Michigan,

Detroit. The legendary 74 years old guitarist was treated by medics on the stage and apparently managed a wave to the few remaining members of the audience as he was wheeled to a waiting ambulance. The cause was later reported as heat exhaustion and we are pleased to report that he is recovering well.

And so, onto this month. This time we have an old favourite that made it to No.1 in the charts, but not this version, which was competing in 1977 at the same time.

No.46

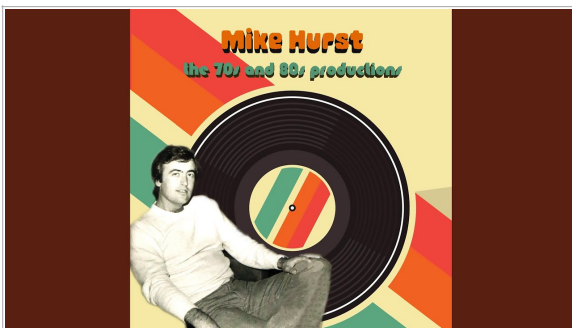


So You Win Again by De Blanc

Those who know the story of **So You Win Again** will be aware that Russ wrote the song and recorded the demo with his own band back in 1976 / 77 and took it to the record company with high expectations of having his first solo hit, only to be told that it was a great song, but it would be better suited to a black artist. Producer **Mickie Most** heard the song and recorded it with **Hot Chocolate**, which rapidly ascended the charts and provided them with their first No.1 record.

I bought this alternative version by **De Blanc** in 1977. Looking back, I can only assume that another high-profile Producer, Mike Hurst, had similar aspirations of success with a black singer and recorded the song with Ralph De Blanc, which was put out by Polydor. Errol Brown won the battle to reach the charts in convincing form, no doubt as a result of Hot Chocolate already being a well-established act.

Ralph De Blanc went on to record more music but never achieved the heights expected of him. He apparently maintains a low profile nowadays according to others who have had reason to try and contact him. Here is an audio clip of the song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jo8NDqT7MUo> , accompanied by an image of Producer Mike Hurst.



[So You Win Again](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jo8NDqT7MUo)

Provided to YouTube by Cherry Red Records
You Win Again · De Blanc
Mike Hurst: The 70s and 80s Productions® 1977 Mike Hurst
Mike Hurst
Composer: Russ Ballard...
www.youtube.com

Meanwhile an 'Erroless' version of Hot Chocolate continues to tour and present their version of the song four decades later, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=me8xhmzlQHA>



[Hot Chocolate - So you win again \(41 Years Later\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=me8xhmzlQHA)

Dutch TV - MAX Proms 24-12-2018
www.youtube.com