



(Header by Sven)

## October 2023

A big welcome to our new readers.

We are now very much into autumn and it is gig season. We are so lucky to have a UK tour and, this time, Russ is playing at a couple of new venues. He is looking forward to seeing you there. If you meet him, mention that you are a newsletter reader. Next month's newsletter will be out after the tour so, if you would like to have something tour related in it, please send it to me at this email address.

Dave found an article from years back detailing an online discussion about Russ's Holey Guitar. He has reproduced it for us. It is lovely that people are so interested and interesting how people make it up for themselves. To read the true story of the HG from Russ himself, see this from his website. <https://russballardmusic.com/theguitar>

As always, your contributions are welcome. Thank you to Michele, Elizabeth (sorry - I forgot to include Elizabeth's question last month!), Rainer and, of course, Dave for their contributions.

Sue

## THIS MONTH - RUSS'S DIARY

This past month has been mostly music and football, I hear you say, not much changed then... 😊 My three grandsons all play football regularly. Archie and Lennie play locally, and Emilio(Emi) plays for the Wolves Academy...Elodie, my granddaughter's passion is dancing and singing. So, my weekends are usually pretty full....Saturdays this past month have been hectic. Elodie has been in competition in Stevenage. She danced the Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers song "Isn't It A Lovely Day" Her friend played the part of Fred, Elodie was a great Ginger and won...I do get emotional at those moments. I think you see them changing from baby, then child into young Lady and life reminds you. I go with Christian to see Archie and Lennie on Sundays...now Emi is in Wolverhampton, I go with Sam and it's fun but a long day.

I've been asked to do some podcasts recently, one with a young man in Argentina called Lautaro M Breit, and another with an executive director of Atlantic Records in New York. His name is Pete Ganbarg. It's great when the host is clued up on my history and Pete really was. It went back to the beginning and after an hour, (which is the length of the programme), we had only reached the eighties...I'm reminded of something my mother used to say when I complained of time passing quickly...."Time can't hurry, Time can't stay, twenty four hours in a day" 😊👍

Lots of Love , Be with you soon....

Russ x

## RUSS - LIFE STORIES

*Hi, everyone...I hope all is good... I'm continuing my autobiography from 1963, we were a few weeks in to a thirteen week season.*

*I'm starting from where The Roulettes were being used as dancers, in a scene from, I think, "Seven Brides For Seven Brothers", although I could be wrong. However, it was written by Rodgers and Hammerstein...Spring Spring Spring...*

*We were also used as Lumberjacks in a scene called 'Out of town'...I think the idea was lifted from the musical 'Oklahoma' or 'Seven Brides for seven Brothers'. Anyway, as the curtains opened on to this scene, the four of us [Roulettes] were sawing a piece of wood that was placed on a barrel. As the music played "Oh the farmyard is busy in a regular tizzy", we were seen, our backs to the audience,*

*sawing in time, which probably looked stupid, four guys sawing one piece of timber, 6 feet long, 4 inches by 4 inches. To make matters worse, we were directed to hold the saws upside down, so as not to cut through our one piece of timber, which was meant to last thirteen weeks. However, telling Mod not to do something was giving him the green light to do it. He made it his purpose of the season to cut through it before the end of the run and in the matter of nine or ten weeks he succeeded by holding the saw conventionally and sawing six times to our one. On that wonderful evening, as the timber crashed on to the stage, instead of dancing and twirling around and hopping to the front of the stage, ready to sing 'Out of Town', all we could do was cry with laughter.*

*That summer of 1963, The Beatles were beginning their domination of the pop scene. Everyone was caught up in the phenomenon. They had released their first two singles, 'Love Me Do' and 'Please Please Me' and their third, 'She Loves You', just about to be released as we started the season. The Beatles were everywhere, on the front of newspapers - on tv news and variety shows, there was Beatles merchandise....their faces were on coffee mugs, wallpaper, toys, bedspreads.....they were all over the place at that time. It seemed the world was ready and waiting for something new. The teenage culture had started with James Dean and most young guys wanted to be like him....The pop culture had followed with Bill Haley and then Elvis had taken over with what the media called Race music. Here was a charismatic white guy singing the kind of songs that had only been sung by black people. Elvis, like James Dean, had attitude....he looked moody, which was something that young people, - [boys in particular]- wanted to identify with.....*

*I'll continue the biog next month....Stay well and enjoy Autumn , Loads of Love,  
Russ xxx*

## **PODCAST 1**

Russ mentions above that he has recently done a podcast with a young man, Lautaro M Breit, from Argentina, for his YouTube channel, Retro Talking Mix. I have been holding the newsletter until this went live today. Here is a link to the podcast. It is just under half an hour. <https://youtu.be/avYeaZm33sU?si=rFYukqGOVjGFNjdd>

## UK TOUR

A final reminder of the UK tour next month. Very soon now! Buy your tickets as soon as you can. I know there are only 28 tickets left for Devizes. We don't get chance to see Russ here in the West Country much, so this is your chance. I don't have ticket numbers for the other venues. Thanks to Sven for this poster.



# RUSS BALLARD

## UK TOUR NOVEMBER '23

7 CHISLEHURST BEAVERWOOD

9 LONDON NELS

10 GREAT YARMOUTH HRH PROG FESTIVAL

11 WIMBORNE THE TIVOLI

17 HULL WRECKING BALL

18 DEVIZES LONG STREET BLUES CLUB



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## PODCAST 2

"Ian and Sven present the final episode of their conversation with Mike Moran. We discuss the diversity of Mike's brilliant career, his friendship with George Harrison (including singing backing vocals with three of The Beatles on a recording session), the day the Pythons asked for money, Ozzy Osbourne and so much more".

You can listen to the podcast via Russ's website here <https://l.facebook.com/l.php?> or wherever you usually listen to podcasts.



## LYRIC OF THE MONTH

From Michele Turner

I have many favourite lyrics from Russ's songs but one which rings true with me and I imagine many other people is from this song.

**"I'm learning to live again for too long you played a part, now it's lost the mystery. But no more can I hold on I'm breaking the chains that tie me."**

**Sue:** Do you know the song? Scroll down to the end of the newsletter to see if you are right.

## QUESTION OF THE MONTH

From Elizabeth

Does Russ have any of the old outfits he used to wear back in the days, especially the Argent ones? Would he think of selling them if he does?

And, I'd love to know what kind of car Russ drives! What cars has he had in the past?

**Russ:** *I wished I'd kept some of the clothes - I didn't place much reverence on clothes.*

*As far as cars...well, I had every car that I dreamed of having....A Lotus Europa, 1973 - a Ferrari Dino in 1975 - a Rolls Shadow in 1979...A new Shadow in 1981 - A Rolls Spirit in 1984 from Jack Barclays, another Spirit in 1986, again from Jack Barclays . Then an XK8 Jaguar and a Jaguar XF. I wasted a lot of money buying cars....good fun though!*

*Lots of love,*

*Russ xxx*

## GERMAN TV

From Rainer Huengerle

In Germany, we have a live entertainment show on television that has been on every Sunday at noon from May to September since 1986. It is called "ZDF-Fernsehgarten" (Televisiongarden). It is an open-air event in which, in addition to

lots of music, various topics such as sports/acrobatics, record attempts, cooking and gardening tips, etc. are covered.

On September 3, the show was themed "Rock in the Garden." I was there. A total of 9 bands played one or two tracks each, including Mando Diao, H.E.A.T and Ronnie Romero, among others.

Ronnie Romero has been the new lead singer of Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow at reunion concerts since 2016. He sang two tracks from Rainbow in the show: "**I surrender**" and "**Since you've been gone**".

Here are the YouTube links of both songs:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OvWuGPeHi8>

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

## **MERCHANDISE CLEARANCE**

We still have some merchandise to sell. A very low number of t-shirts in small sizes, the 2007 live CD, lyric posters and lanyards. Please see the merchandise email for details and send me an email here if you are interested.

## **DAVE'S ARTICLE**

### **Russ Ballard's custom 70's guitar with holes in it?**

This title was recently spotted on a forum. I felt it was worth sharing with our readers.

***Tue Apr 19, 2011 – Vintage DNA, Christchurch, Dorset***

Does anyone have any information on Russ Ballard's Strat style guitar he played in Argent?



Looks like a Strat with a tele neck but the top horn is shorter than a Strat, obviously a one off but does anyone have any info? I've just built a "tribute" Strat using a standard Strat body with "weight reduction" holes drilled in the body and warmoth neck and am really interested to know the origin and history of Russ's guitar. Does he still have it?

Allan

***Tue Apr 19, 2011 – Dan LB, Wicklow, Ireland***

Looks like it *\*was\** once a Strat. It looks like the holes were drilled into it and the upper horn was carved back to that shape and then the whole thing refinished and a Tele neck bolted on to it. The neck pocket was probably modified to accommodate the square heel on the Tele neck too. I'm just guessing though....

Dan

***Wed Apr 20, 2011 - Vintage DNA, Christchurch, Dorset***

Yes, certainly looks like it could be a modded Strat tele hybrid. I'd really like to know who built it and when, doesn't seem to be any info online other than it was built in 1972 or earlier. Interestingly in this 1972 video it seems to be white with Strat neck

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-6v4H4BtWI>

Whereas in this 1973 whistle test video it is gold with tele neck

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsG5V-o6uxY>



***Wed Apr 20, 2011 – Hewesy***

Funky bit of kit! Looks like he wanted a Strat, Tele and SG at the same time (that top horn looks very SG to me). I note he has his own website these days, why not email and ask?

Hewesy

***Wed Apr 20, 2011 - Vintage DNA, Christchurch, Dorset***

Doesn't seem to be any email contact address on his web site, I did ask the question a while back on Russ's myspace site but didn't get a reply

***Thu Jun 09, 2011 – Vintage DNA, Christchurch, Dorset***

Well, I've finally finished building my "Holy Strat" which is very strongly influenced by Russ's much modded Strat. I thought drilling all of those holes in the body would have an adverse effect on tone and sustain - to my amazement it seems to sustain better and feel more alive than it did prior to body surgery!



***Thu Jun 09, 2011- Artzmusic, USA***

Great job! Still musing about the sustain. Interesting observation. Does it resonate in any particular key now!! Oh, and you'll never need a guitar stand - just hang it on anything!

Rick

***Thu Jun 09, 2011 – Chrome Dome, Northwest England***

Wow - that Holy Strat looks great! I've got an 8lb 10oz Strat and if I was brave, I might consider this approach (I'm not!).

Edit: I'm pretty sure that when Gibson drill the (much smaller) weight relief holes in the mahogany bodies (they've done this for years on the non-Historic LP Standards) they put them in similar locations. I think I read somewhere that as long as you stay away from the area between the bridge and neck, the tonal differences are no greater than they would be between any two "regular" guitars anyway.

***Thu Jun 09, 2011 - Vintage DNA, Christchurch, Dorset***

This guitar started life as a £100 Chinese Strat copy, it became an exercise in turd polishing! The body looks to be Basswood rather than Ash or Alder and had a thick poly finish which was completely sanded off and replaced with a thin cellulose finish instead. Now has all new electrics and Bare-Knuckle Irish Tour PU's. The theory I'd heard was that if holes weren't placed in the line of strings, then it shouldn't make a difference to tone but this doesn't seem to be the case, could be that some of the rigidity and mass has gone from the wood and made it more resonant as a result? Thinner finish would certainly be a factor, there are other changes too - it now has a Warmoth '59 profile conversion neck with Gibson 24.75" scale length instead of standard Fender item so it could be some of it is down to that. It's certainly lost none of its Strat "quack" which again is a surprise. A friend has a collection of over 25 Strats and this held up very well in a "Sound off" with them, sounding as good as his top 5 instruments including 54 Custom shop Model and US Standard and a couple of early Tokai Springy Sounds. This was as much a surprise to me as it was to him - my belief was that Swamp Ash is always the tonewood of choice for Strats but by some happy accident this sounds really good, it also really resonates when played unplugged which to me is the sign of a good guitar. Hard to say how much difference the holes have made to the tone but certainly not had a detrimental effect, quite the opposite. Definitely a keeper

***Fri Jun 10, 2011- zenguitar, Devon***

Bottom line? Congratulations, that's a lovely looking guitar you've made for yourself. And if you are happy that it plays and sounds as good as it looks, that's all that matters. Well done, and enjoy it

Andy

***Fri Jun 10, 2011 – Delete This User***

nice job on the Swiss cheese Strat!

***Fri Jul 01, 2011 – Techno-confused***

Looks like you've done a great job on that Strat.

My wife and I were lucky enough to bump into Russ Ballard at a John Mayall gig a few years ago. Meeting Russ was great, and he was extremely generous with his time, talking to us for just under an hour - about Argent, songwriting and life in general. Great when you meet a hero... and they turn out to be really nice, genuine people.

As it happens, I did ask him about his Strat. Yes, it was originally a Strat... I can't remember what year it was made; I think early to mid-60s. Anyway, Russ had a friend of his do the work on the body etc. Russ wasn't too fond of the middle pickup on a Strat... so he removed it.

One of the Old Grey Whistle Test DVDs has Argent playing God Gave Rock and Roll to You. I think Russ plays that Strat on it... I'll try to check and let you know.

***Sat Jul 16, 2011 – Wonks, Reading, UK***

He does play that Strat on the OGWT video.

***Sat Jul 16, 2011 – Vintage DNA, Christchurch, Dorset***

Thats great info and really pleased he's such a nice guy too. Looks like he has the same opinion of Strat middle pick-up as Richie Blackmore - can't say I agree, to me the middle pick-up is a big part of the Strat sound.

I wonder what happened to his Strat? Haven't seen it on any recent photos.

***Sun Jul 17, 2011 – Wonks, Reading, UK***

I'd imagine the Russ Ballard Strat (like Ritchie Blackmore's) was old enough to just have a 3-way selector switch (5-way as standard started sometime in 1977). So short of jamming the selector switch in the in-between positions for those now standard position '2' and '4' sounds (fine in the studio but difficult live when swapping positions) the middle pick-up wouldn't be quite as useful to some people. And removing the pickup reduces the overall magnetic string pull so the other two pickups can be brought nearer to the strings before the onset of wolf notes.

***Fri Sep 23, 2011 – Glamhag***

I believe I may have witnessed the end of the Strat's working life.

I saw Argent twice in the 70s at Plymouth Guildhall. From the first gig I knew that he had a habit at the end of the set of throwing the Strat spectacularly high in the air and catching her neatly. On the second gig he did the same thing, but without the catching her neatly bit.

I never saw them live again but on subsequent TV appearances I noticed he was now playing a different, more conventional and less interesting guitar.

Poor holey Strat!

***Sat Sep 24, 2011 – Alfredo***

No, it's not dead. It's still in use, as of 2012. Argent - Hold Your Head Up, Butlins 2012

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYL7wPeahf0>

***Tue Mar 26, 2013 – Gadget13769, West Midlands***

Five of my guitars have holes. Here's one...



**Wed Mar 27, 2013 – zenguitar, Devon**

Hey Gadget, that's a serious woodworm problem mate. Have you had them all fumigated?

## What's a wolfnote?

I'm interested in doing this to one of my tele's so what size holes have you drilled and what tools did you use to drill the holes? Many thanks!

## Would all those holes weaken the body?

The above article is featured on the **Sound on Sound** magazine website. Here is a link to the original article

## DAVE'S COVER QUEST

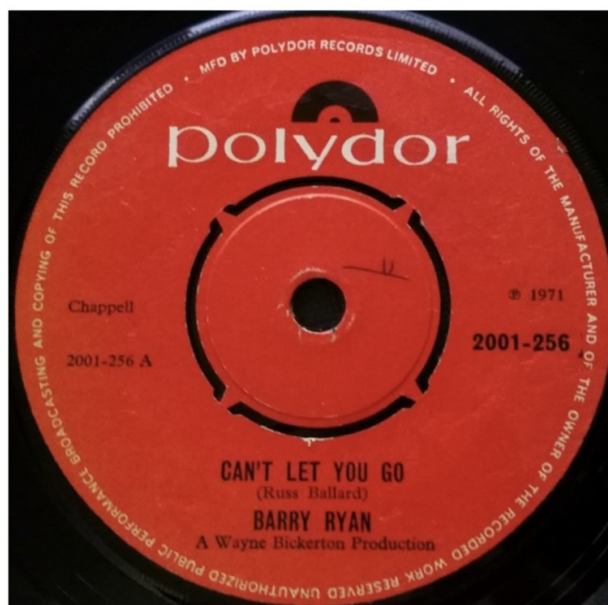
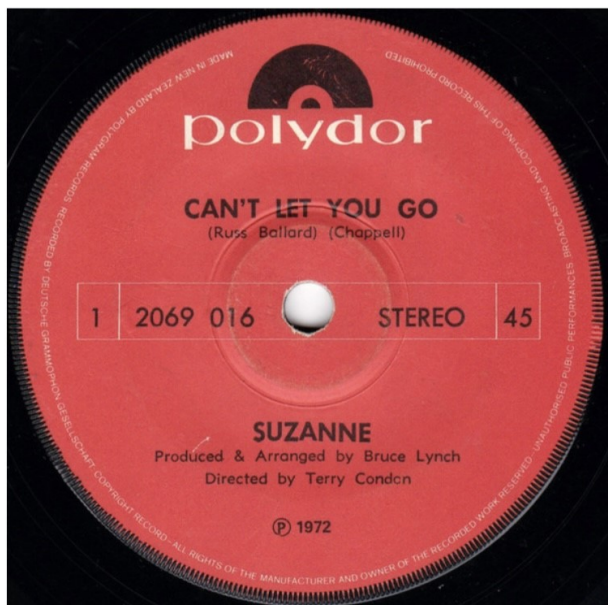
It's the time of the season (sounds like a good song title!) for spooky goings on, so this month's cover quest is yet another cover from Russ Ballard's 1976 Winning LP.

# No.62



Born on 20 March 1951, Suzanne Donaldson hails from New Zealand and, with her sister Judy, performed in the 1960s in a duo called The Chicks. Suzanne went solo in 1969, releasing a number of singles and albums through a number of record labels including Philips, Polydor and RCA Victor. In fact, she had already put out a Russ Ballard song when she released *Can't Let You Go* on the Polydor label in 1972, a little bit unusual, because only a year earlier, they also issued Barry Ryan's version of the song.





**Can't Let You Go** was produced by Bruce Lynch. The two of them got married and moved to the UK in 1973, where they did session work together for artists including Art Garfunkel, Leo Sayer and Showaddywaddy. She toured as a backing singer with Cat Stevens for 3 years. She also allegedly sang backing on the original hit version of Kung Fu Fighting!

Suzanne continued to record as a solo artist and was signed to Ringo Starr's record company Ring O' Records. In 1977 she released a cover version of **Born on Halloween**, later followed by a cover of **Smokey Robinson's** You Really Got a Hold On Me. Neither of these were hits.

Suzanne continues to work in the music industry. Unfortunately, I can't trace a clip of the song, although the single does pop up on sites such as eBay every now and then.

## LYRIC OF THE MONTH - ANSWER

Everyone loves this one when Russ plays it at gigs. **I Can't Hear You No More**. Here is a video from way back, which was used for promotion for Russ's 2013 show in Lisbon.

<https://youtu.be/llhDAH9TX4U?si=HzXDDaPR85J7qciX>