



Header by Sven

This is not the May newsletter...that will be on the way soon. Russ is having a very busy time. In May we have the show in Estoril, Portugal to report on so, in this email we have Ian's blog from the second part of the Rock meets Classic tour in Germany. If you have already read this on Russ's Facebook page, there is no need to read on...it is exactly the same. This is for those newsletter readers who are not on FB.

Sue

Day 10 - Tuesday 16th April

Wake up in Bochum to awful weather. What a contrast to Bavaria....probably a 15 degree difference!

We have the luxury of being picked up at 3.45 so an opportunity for some exercise.....only it's bloody raining.

Russ has an interview at 10 but the guy doesn't get in touch (he apologises later).

Robert is like me and loves shopping so we plan a walk to the local shopping centre (10 mins). Russ prefers to stay in his room, catch up with his family and grab a bite to eat.

Shopping with Robert is fun and we have similar taste in clothes. Robert picks out a shirt for me but they don't have my size. He buys a jacket but not before checking with me.... 😏

We have a quick coffee and Robert consumes a huge cake (ok I did have a little bit).

Time to head to the venue, it's 30km and the traffic is awful, and we arrive an hour behind schedule. It's pouring down now.

Soundchecks are brief.

At the soundcheck Tarja Turunen mimes a lovely message for Russ . Check her out...she is amazing.

Sven Kramer is a guest tonight (from team RGB) together with his wife Yasmine and it's great to see them.



I walk past Chris Thompson backstage (original singer from Manfred Mann's Earth Band) who is there to give Jesse from Supertramp a guitar. He sadly doesn't have time to stay for the show.

We reach Russ's dressing room and I hang up his shirts (yes, I'm here to look after him!). The earlier the better to ensure any creases drop out before he goes on stage.



Russ has a face to face interview....10 mins only as we are behind schedule.

But not before Robert brings some ladies from the strings department to meet "Sir Russell of the Ballard".

The venue is huge but probably the smallest audience so far (3k ish) and there are a few empty seats dotted around.

I grab a quick chat with [Paul Shortino](#) before he goes on stage.

Another great show.....

Lots of guests backstage tonight and we get on the bus at 11.30, 45 mins later we arrive at the hotel. The autograph guys are out in force in the freezing cold outside.

Time for bed.

Here is an overview of the whole show in Oberhausen, with thanks to Sven.

<https://youtu.be/rDd9RD32FvA?si=kD9vKSTAFIYtXFlc>

Day 11 - Wednesday 17th April

Wake up and it's still bloody miserable outside.

Less than 5 hours kip thanks to a lot of noisy bxxxxx downstairs.

First to breakfast at 7.45 and Russ is there already.

On to the bus for a 7 hour (plus a legal rest stop) journey.

I've found a curry house 11 mins walk from our hotel in Inglestadt.....Robert has already checked the menu. Russ loves a curry so he's happy. Midge as well.....really looking forward to it.

Music quiz on the bus ...Robert asks the questions.....both Russ and Midge are very impressive.....

At last we have some progress towards "McVities, The Musical"it's basically about a power struggle to see who will feature in the top layer...(I think that was Midge's idea not quite sure). Anyway, it is hoped that Lionel Richtea will agree to the lead role.... 😊

Lunch stop at a truck drivers car park and we venture to a nearby McDonald's (so rock and roll daaaaarling) to get Russ a plant burger



Arrival at a very nice hotel indeed and two nights too!

Just enough time to check in, quick change and it's curry time.

The curry is a great success and I breathe a sigh of relief having found and suggested it. Midge Ure joins Robert, Russ and myself and we walk to the restaurant. When it's time to leave, it starts raining so Russ and I get a cab.....can't have our star getting

cold 🤧

We get back and Russ and I watch Arsenal exit the Champions league on my iPad. I go to bed and leave Russ with my iPad to watch the extra time between Real Madrid and Manchester City. The iPad's battery goes before the penalties take place....🙄🙄



L to R: Paul Shortino, Russ, Robert Hart.

Day 12- Thursday 18th April

So we wake up in not so sunny Ingelstadt at easily the best hotel so far and we have been here two nights. Some of the band went to the Spa yesterday. It has two swimming pools too. Some call it work.....

After breakfast Russ, Robert and I head for some shops nearby to keep up the steps, despite the weather. It turns into one of the funniest moments on the tour.....

We buy Russ a new suitcase, it's time to retire the one he has with him. 😎
In the same shop Russ and Robert are attracted to the toy department (yes, I know

😬)...this turns into a present buying session for the end of tour party. Russ is crying with laughter. The highlight is a cabbage patch lookalike doll with is earmarked for Tarja. Uncontrollable rock stars.

😄 Stay tuned for the presentation on the bus tomorrow.

Russ, Robert and I have lunch in the hotel. Yummy.....with thick cut chips too.

Naughty but something I learned is you have to grab food while you can....

Exciting news for "McVitie, the Musical", another star has been cast. It's no other than Gary Baldi, who plays a real tough cookie.



We head to the gig and yet another great venue. All the artists dressing rooms are in a row. With four gigs to go, the orchestra are getting brave now and knocking on the dressing room doors and asking them to sign their programmes. They always get a great reception from Russ.

In Munich, the Duke managed to blag me a poster with the date of my birthday and the venue on and I invite the artists to sign it for me. Thanks guys.

😍 It's heading for the Treble Bar in Casa Bela Vista.

Russ goes on stage and delivers another faultless set. We have a little trouble during "God Gave Rock And Roll To You" when his guitar cuts out. I am standing at the side of the stage (as you do) I notice and gesture to his guitar tech. Turns out a fuse blew.

Cedric the guitar tech rigs up another amp in time for "Since You Been Gone". Cheers Cedric.

On the way back from the stage in a very draughty corridor we are approached by a Paramedic on duty nearby. He asks if Russ would sign a guitar for him. The answer is yes, but can we do it in the dressing room as it's freezing. 🥶

He comes in and and Russ duly signs the guitar. We are joined by Joe who asks to borrow it and he gives a rendition of "Look What The've Done To My Song Ma" with Russ on backing vocals. I film it and afterwards tell the paramedic (who has now been with us

for 10 mins) that it's a good job nobody got taken ill while he's away. Bless him, he doesn't quite get the humour. He leaves and then returns 10 mins later as he wants a copy of the video. No problem. I think he got a little telling off from one of his superiors

who spotted his movements. 🤔😬

Quick beer after the show and it's time to get on the bus. Russ enjoys his usual after gig vegan roll which I manage to rescue from Joe who has taken the wrong one from our fridge.

Three more shows to go

Day 13 - Friday 19th April

Russ (as always) is the first down to breakfast.

We are heading for Frankfurt today for another tour highlight, the "Hundred Year Hall". A dome purpose built music venue.

I have some spare time and interview our brilliant bus driver Mino who gives me a wonderful tour of the bus.

https://youtu.be/HJlcG_AqXEk?si=bMUsnP3RKR_HAj2Z

It's a few hours on the bus but as always the banter makes the time go quickly. Russ and Robert decide this is the time to do some toy presentations. Hilarious. Tarja's face is priceless. The dolls head is even signed. She will treasure the doll and put it

on her piano apparently 😬.

The weather is foul.

We arrive at the hotel (3pm) and have a 50 min check in turnaround to get the bus for the venue. I am packing my bag for the gig and I take a call from Joe one of the tour managers. Jesse from Supertramp is going to give the soundcheck a miss and stay at the

hotel and be picked up at 7. Does Russ want to join him? I call Russ and he jumps at the opportunity. Saves a lot of hanging around and the sound guys are so good they have everything perfect by now.

We go for a pasta lunch nearby which is delicious and then try and get some shut eye.

A "runner" from the venue (tour phrase) picks us and Jesse up and takes us to the venue. I record a quick venue tour video. Russ gets to his dressing room and signs some bits and pieces for the driver and Joe.



Massive vegan chocolate dressing room delivery today from the catering guys. The dressing room is down four flights of stairs but we have a really nice one. Wi fi still crap.



We listen to the Who live at Hyde Park in the dressing room. It's a tight backstage area but as usual, Russ follows Midge and delivers another unbelievable performance. Word and note perfect and the audience are amazing. Someone in the front row has a "Russ gave rock and roll to you" T Shirt. Russ makes a bee line for him during the performance. As Russ comes off stage, Manfred (the big boss tour promoter) hugs him in the wings and thanks him for everything. "Since You Been Gone" completes the evening as usual and everyone looks really happy.

Back at the hotel Russ and I have a G and T nightcap and it's time for bed. Two gigs to go.....

Day 14 - Saturday 20th April- "Spinal Tap meets Rock Meets Classic".....the blog continues.

I wake up and my phone rings. Russ is next door and he calmly tells me "I'm locked in my room". The latch that he put on shows no sign of releasing.....he's tried everything. Now it's funny because when I left my room for the gig yesterday, mine was jammed too.

I had a mini panic (not that they would miss me onstage 😊) but some brute force

and ignorance got me out. I suggest to Russ he negotiates the button at the top which seems to be there to release the thing.....he tries again and thankfully manages to escape. Can you imagine the headlines???? "Rock star locked in German hotel room and misses

gig causing numerous riots at venue ". Makes me think it's time to play "Chained" from Ring of Hands on my headphones (see what I did there?).

On the bus, the artists are in great demand from fans and performers getting their signing requests in early before the tour ends.

We are in Nurnberg which has a beautiful lake and a monument where a famous individual did his rallies back in the day. Midge tells us it's worth a visit but it's chucking it down so sadly, that doesn't happen. We chose to chill and Russ again opts to give

the soundcheck a miss in exchange for more time to relax at the hotel. Paul Shortino does the same.

The usual autograph hunters (some familiar faces) are around and one makes a bee line for me. "Can you sign please?"I ask him who he thinks I am ..."Paul Shortino" he says. Should have gone to specsavers..... 🤪🤪🤪🤪🤪

Russ is hungry and the hotel have no food available at all. I suggest a cab into town as there is absolutely nothing nearby. We must have walked for 45 mins before finding something.....and it's raining. Don't they know who he is?....

A taxi is arranged for 7pm to take us to the venue. (Russ Paul and myself). Mark the tour manager sends me a map showing where we can access backstage so I can show the driver. This doesn't go well as there are barriers stopping us getting to where we need

to go. A Spinal Tap moment is about to happen.

Paul says to the driver ..."look we are performers, I'm on stage in 30 mins.....stop here and I'll remove the barrier myself ". He does. (I am desperately trying to film this moment). The driver backs up and drives through the newly formed gap.....only to be confronted

by a steward in a bright yellow vest "nicht, nicht". Paul tells the steward he is due on stage. The steward couldn't care less. We have to do a U turn and now I have Mark the tour manager on the phone and he is giving very clear

🙄 instructions to this poor driver. I have visions of us (Paul is in full stage gear by the way, including diamante cane with a skull at the top with red eyes 🗿)

walking to the venue alongside the crowd. Can you imagine ? "Darling, is that Russ Ballard who sold 100m records over there "....."Don't be silly luv, it must be a lookalike." 🤪🤪🤪🗣️🎤

(Did you know that Paul Shortino is actually in the Spinal Tap movie?)

Paul takes the stage with minutes to spare....(see video).

We get to our dressing room which I kid you not, is in the kitchen. We can close the door and get privacy but it's a first! When I take Russ down to the stage for his performance, we walk past the kitchen staff (thanks Chucky, you did a brilliant job) doing the washing up.

Joe also is getting "Rock Meets Classic" guitars signed at the venue by the artists.

Before Russ goes on stage I spot some blood on his shirt. His thumb has been bleeding. Joe gets a plaster and I wrap it around his thumb. Two minutes later it comes off.... 🤪



Another faultless performance and again, the audience take Russ to their hearts....another standing ovation.
One gig to go.....

Rock Meets Classic....The Final Blog.

Day 15 - Sunday 21st April - They think it's all over....😓

We wake up in our hotel in Nurnberg and it's our last day so a different schedule as follows-

- Morning free (that means grab food and kip where you can)
- Late checkout and leave hotel at 1.30pm
- Travel to the venue in Wurzburg for soundcheck (starting an hour earlier tonight)
- Leave venue around 11.30 ish for Hotel in Frankfurt airport
- In the morning everyone flies home....

(Now this is the theorymore about that later 😊).

More poster signing on the coach (even the artists collect these things y'know, we are all fans underneath)nice photo of Tanja, Russ, Midge and Robert scribbling.



There is a party atmosphere in the dressing rooms....this is the last time! 🥳
I video all the artists individually and have a quick chat for Russ's Facebook page....(watch this space)



Manfred the tour promoter (and the Grand Fromage) comes round and thanks everyone and brings some of his friends to meet Russ.

He also gives all the artists and assistants an envelope with a lovely picture of the whole touring family taken a week or so ago. On the back is a QR code with exclusive photos and videos to come. A lovely touch....Manfred and his team are a class act.

Joe comes into our room and brings us some beer (makes a change from drinking it 🍷).

Seriously, Joe has been wonderful to both of us and we will miss him. The show goes like clockwork, by now this finely oiled machine is even more slick (no pun intended Midge 😊) if that was possible.

Paul Shortino films Russ during “Magic” ...Paul loves that track and every night comes out to watch it at the side of the stage. He recommends that side of the stage as it’s a clear view so I film “God Gave Rock And Roll To You” there on my camera.

Paul and Russ watch the “Magic” recording back in Russ’s dressing room. Russ again gets a standing ovation. I see Alexander Graff in the audience and invite him backstage to meet Russ. He’s been to at least four shows (time to wash that “Russ Gave Rock and Roll to You” t shirt Alex

😏😏only

joking.). He was the “German gentleman” I previously referred to on here. During the finale the artists are told to bow twice, once towards the audience and once towards the orchestra.



We all go back to the dressing room and already we are saying goodbyes. Some of the musicians are leaving directly from here to their various hometowns in Germany...but most are on the bus bound for our overnight hotel in Frankfurt airport.

We all get on the coach and it takes a long time to finally get going....luckily I have the wonderful Paul Shortino

👤 for companywe debate US politics (we are proper rock and roll).....Robert is

on a short journey for a hotel in Würzburg as he's off to Cologne tomorrow to start some dates with Manfred Mann's Earthband. Midge is dreaming of Portugal.....Tanja is chilling still wondering where she is going to display her signed doll when she gets home



Jesse and Midge have a great chat about all things music.....John Helliwell is in his seat downstairs and looks dapper as usual ("turn me on there man").

Midnight approaches and we still haven't left. It's nearly two hours to

Frankfurt.....😞😞😞and

then, we start to move. However....Midge correctly surmises that the back wheels of the coach are spinning round....over and over againthe driver is having a lot of trouble getting away from the venue....it's incredibly tighthe can't turn properlyit takes

30 mins to get out of the car park.

Russ sleeps for the duration of the journey and we finally arrive at our hotel in Frankfurt Airport. Quick check in and Russ and I finally get to our rooms...I get in bed and check the time....2.20am



Our flight to London the next morning is 10am and rather than the hotel shuttle Mark and Joe arrange a "Ballardmobile" for 7.30. I set the alarm for 6.30...wake up, turn on my phone.....and it rings.....it's Russ. He's already been to breakfast.

My god, how does

he do it?

At breakfast we see Mark who is down in reception and making sure the artists get off ok. These guys are unbelievable....time to "Fly Away"..😄

The Holey guitar is (thankfully) waiting for us at the other end at a wet and dismal looking Stanstead. Russ's driver Ryan makes the last leg of the journey very comfortable in his Mercedes.

I am staying overnight locally to Russ and flying back to see Karen in Portugal tomorrow. I've missed her. I spend the afternoon



. One last curry with Russ in the evening and the adventure is over.

12 hotels, 10 shows, 17 nights.....My thanks to Russ for this unbelievable opportunity. I hope I did a good job looking after him.
Thanks to all the artists but especially Robert Hart (what laughs we had....look at us...just look at us!) and Paul Shortino (legend...he's invited us to Vegas! He's also off to a Rock Legends festival in Mexico next week.....good luck pal).

Manfred, Mark, Joe, the Band, the Orchestra.....everyone.....thanks so much for everything.



What a show. If ever I need to relive it, it's "Just A Dream Away".



