



(Header by Sven)

This email contains only Ian's Halle diary. If you have already read it on Russ's Facebook page, this is the same thing. I am sending it in a separate email otherwise the newsletter would be too long. Enjoy!

Sue

## **BRIDGES TO CLASSICS - HALLE, GERMANY**

### **Ian's Diary**

#### **Day 1 - Thursday 6th June**

Russ, Denny, Karen and myself take a taxi to London City airport for a flight to Berlin. City airport is such a useful alternative to Stanstead, Heathrow etc....far more civilised.

There are many ways of getting to the town of Halle in Germany where the gig is taking place. Options included flight/ rail or two flights (via Leipzig) but we decided to fly into Berlin and get a Ballardmobile road transfer from there (two hours). That proved

to be a good decision..... 🤔



We collect our bags, but before we make our way I check the condition of the Holey Guitar. I'm pleased to report it's arrived in tip top condition.



Arrive at the Hotel in Halle around 15.30 having made good timing. We are being picked up at 17.45 for the band and choir (only) rehearsal. Joe the tour manager sends me a message ...he's taken the two flight option and one of the aircraft has a technical issue

and he has to change planes. Our friend

Roland is taking the train option from Switzerland and is having massive delays due to strike action....well done Denny for deciding on our travel route!



We even have some spare time to walk towards town, stretch our legs and have a coffee.

We arrive at rehearsal in town to be greeted by a number of smiling faces including Bernd the Conductor and Benni the arranger and keyboard player. We met Benni and his wife Ziggi in Munich during "Rock Meets Classic" and it's lovely to see him again. I'm

sure he remembers me 🤔 but does insist on calling me "Nick" .... 🤔

We get out the Holey Guitar and go straight to rehearsal. The band and choir are already prepared. Have a look at some of the videos (on YouTube)...amazing stuff.



At the show on Saturday, Russ is performing the 5 songs he did during RMC....

“You Can Do Magic”

“God Gave Rock And Roll To You”

“The Fire Still Burns”

“Voices”

“Since You Been Gone”

I transfer mp3 file intros from “Voices” and “Fire Still Burns” from my phone to Benni’s laptop so they can be used in a similar way to RMC.

The rehearsal venue used to be an old cinema but it’s been refurbished and has great acoustics. It reminds me of a recording studio (see pics).

We finish rehearsal to find that our driver isn’t there and we need to get to a restaurant for dinner ASAP. Thankfully the amazing soprano Anke offers to drop us off at the hotel.

We get a cab into the Market Square to an Italian restaurant I found on Tripadvisor and eventually at Joe’s suggestion, we are joined by Benni, Bernd, and all the musicians.

It's been a long day...time for bed...more rehearsals tomorrow, this time with full orchestra.

## **Day 2 - Halle**

The weather is being extremely kind to us and so in the morning we decide to go for a walk and sample the delights of the town and head for the Market Square. Even for a Friday it's buzzing and we soon find the Handel statue and the first photo opportunity.

You can feel a great atmosphere amongst the locals as they continue the celebrations of their legendary composer.

Word has it that there is a Handel museum nearby and fortunately we bump into our tour manager and friend, Joe. He offers to take us to the museum. It's not long before he has negotiated tickets for us to go inside. It's on three floors and is full of amazing

musical instruments from years gone by.

I get the impression that Russ is itching to play some of them. And I'm about to be proved right....

We are in a sea of pianos, clavicords, violins, cellos and others but here's the thing...all of them have transparent plastic locks (so you can't play them)....apart from one. We debate this...Russ says the instrument looks newer than the others....he starts to walk

away from it and like a naughty schoolboy I suggest he has a play....and he goes back towards it ..... "you know you want to..." ..... "how about giving us the beginning of "I Don't Believe In Miracles"?

And so it came to pass.....





On the way out, word has got around amongst museum staff that a legend is amongst them and Russ poses for photos and signs tickets.

Friday is the day before the gig and Russ has to be at the venue itself at 1pm to ensure he is happy with his guitar set up. He can then leave but needs to return at 7pm for a full run through with the band and sixty piece orchestra.

We arrive early afternoon to the venue...wow what a set up...and it's really warm. Then, we have a problem ..and it's not great news....Russ's Modulator (pedal effects) is playing up...it was fine yesterday.....but now it's not playing ball....

Russ asks me to help and whilst a little inexperienced, I'm on my knees with Henrik (Russ's Guitar tech...more about him later), trying to sort it. I suggest a reboot and after ten seconds it seems to work.





So that's it for now....we head back to the hotel and I get a call from Russ's friend of 40 years, Michael.

He's joining us for the gig and has arrived at the hotel. It's so lovely to see him.

We leave the hotel around 7.30 pm to head for the venue for Russ's full run through with the orchestra...should be a piece of cake....just go through the songs.

An Indian restaurant has been booked for the evening around 9pm

Before he starts Russ checks the pedal.....it's not playing ball again....his presets are there but not working ....this delays us for some time....Russ being the consummate professional is extremely concerned.....

Henrik suggests a solution....tomorrow (show time) .....he will bring his own amp and set up the effects in advance for Russ. Russ can then check them during tomorrow's run through/sound check. It seems the best solution.

Regardless, Russ does his run through of all the songs and apart from the guitar sound, he sounds fantastic and the integration with the orchestra is near perfect.

We manage to get to the Indian around 9.30/9.45.....and the wine flows!

A nightcap in the Hotel Bar before bed.....Benni and his wife Ziggi are there.

"Hello Nick" he says and gives me a hug.....I think it's time.....as we hug I whisper in his ear "my names Ian".....his face is a picture, his mouth wide open, his hands on his head. And then

he laughs.....very loud. 🤣

Every time he sees me after that he makes a point of saying....."Hello IAN" 🤣

A long day and a late night.....sleep is calling, it's showtime tomorrow evening.

### **Day 3 - Saturday 8th June**

How fortunate are we with this weather....high of 28 today. A nice warm evening expected too.

The morning is free as we have to be back at the venue for the final run through at 3 so we decide to go for a walk. There is a Beatles museum in town but Michael suggests we give it a miss. "I should have known better" to suggest it. So it's time to get the

steps up again (Russ did 14k yesterday).

We seem to walk for ages and it's great getting some exercise and just chatting about everything and anything. After a while, a drinks break is suggested and is

very welcome. Russ is trying not to talk too much so he can save his voice for this evening.

A light lunch in a local Italian restaurant is consumed as we won't be eating this evening before the gig. We sit outside and spot Roland "The Duke" He joins us for a drink.

At 3pm we head for the venue and the first job is to check that Russ is happy with his guitar sound. (Remember the pedal board wasn't working properly yesterday).

Henrik the Guitar Tech suggests that Russ heads out into the audience area and listens while he plays the Holey guitar. In short, Russ is very happy with all three sounds that Henrik has programmed. What I didn't find out until later is that Henrik spent Friday

evening and Saturday morning listening to Russ's guitar sound on YouTube both live and in the studio. His objective was to get as close as he could to those sounds and programme them accordingly.

A long wait ensues now before being picked up from the Hotel for the gig at 8.30....(show starts 9). Siesta time.

We all arrive at the venue before the show starts and it's standing room only. We are told around 3k people are in, some have bought their own food and drink and everyone is having a good time in a unique atmosphere.

I spot our friend Alexander Grafe at the front of the stage. He's washed his "Russ Gave Rock and Roll To You" T.Shirt especially for tonight! Good to see you again Alex. I also get tapped on the shoulder by Markus Linten and his family...thanks for coming Markus!

Joe and I go backstage with Russ (well I say backstage...it's a bridge across the field and a tent for privacy). The ants are enjoying Joe's fruit and the band are getting ready to go on stage.

I witness them all hand in hand (including Russ) for a pre performance ritual and it's a sight to behold.

To be honest there is a lot of hanging around for Russ before going on stage (over an hour and a half) but Joe and I entertain him as best we can and he rings his family back home too. We also have to put some plaster in his ear to make sure his earpiece stays

in. It's a major operation I can tell you and we try not to hurt him (well not until the plaster comes off anyway



🤔🤔). If you look carefully in some of the stage pics you can see Joe's handywork.

It's finally time to Russ to go onstage and he gets a great welcome. Starting with "Magic" and then "God Gave" before a break for an amazing firework display. He returns to the stage to perform "The Fire Still Burns" (see what they did there?) and finally, "Since You Been Gone".



Everyone is on a huge high after the gig and Russ enjoys a well earned beer. Joe organises cars to take the Ballard entourage back to the hotel (via police escort) from the venue and we reconvene at the Hotel bar where a few glasses are consumed !

OK, I may have made the police escort bit up....🤔

The next morning we make our way back to Berlin Airport only to enjoy a near two hour delay for the flight to London. It's Only Rock and Roll but we like it.....and we still made it back (just) to the local Indian in time.

What a unique experience. Thanks to everyone who was so nice to us, Bernd, Benni, Joe, Henrik and all the fabulous musicians. And of course Russ who smashed it, yet again.

Until the next time.....

Intro and You Can Do Magic: [https://youtu.be/CED\\_EiwFBC8?si=7de7jJtpf26GeBCI](https://youtu.be/CED_EiwFBC8?si=7de7jJtpf26GeBCI)

Voices: [https://youtu.be/W6qnsYBz\\_-s?si=Xeh0f-5VNBoP1GW9](https://youtu.be/W6qnsYBz_-s?si=Xeh0f-5VNBoP1GW9)

See more videos on YouTube.