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LEAVING

ME



More than 50 years after their break-up, **THE ROULETTES** more than deserve their own catalogue number in the '60s pop library, if only for such gems as 'Bad Time' and 'The Long Cigarette' or self-written floor-fillers like 'Junk' and 'Jackpot'. Providing a backbone for Adam Faith, they were on par with The Shadows, while their impressive musical curriculum encompasses the likes of Chris Andrews, Unit 4+2, The Kinks, Argent, French superstar Richard Anthony and The Shadows themselves.

All four Roulettes still meet on a regular basis and **EDDY BONTE** was invited to join guitarist **Peter Thorp**, drummer **Bob Henrit**, bassist **John 'Mod' Rogan** and guitarist/keyboardist **Russ Ballard** to reflect on their story and set the record straight





Adam Faith and The Roulettes rehearsing at The Royal Albert Hall, 17th September 1961, their first show with him. L-R: John Roberts, Martin Blackwell, Tony Burgess, Peter Thorp, Adam Faith

By erroneously commencing The Roulettes' story in May 1962, websites and encyclopaedia conveniently argue that The Roulettes were put together to provide British pop star Adam Faith with a new sound to cope with "the dawn of The Beatles" or "to compete with the beat artists about to overtake the British music scene". In actual fact, The Roulettes first hit the stage with Adam Faith nine months earlier, when Merseybeat was still a localised underground phenomenon at best and The Beatles pleased the German crowds with 'La Bamba' and 'When The Saints Go Marching In'.

Guitarist Peter Thorp tells us what really happened. "The Roulettes were formed in September '61. When at Sutton High School For Boys I formed a band with various friends called The Strangers. We played regularly at The Sutton Granada, where we met Cliff Richard's PR man Leslie Perrin. When Perrin was approached by Adam Faith's management to find a new touring band for Adam Faith, who had until then mostly been backed by The John Barry Seven, Perrin put our name forward. We passed the audition. Our last gig as The Strangers was on Saturday 16th September at Sutton Public Hall and the very next day we became The Roulettes backing Adam Faith at The Royal Albert Hall! Quite a jump!"

Besides, in September '61 Adam Faith simply wasn't preoccupied with changing his winning formula. The Pizzicato King was still riding high in the charts while doubling as a successful film actor. In fact, Faith was immersed in variety, all-entertainment shows and summer seasons. Adam Faith's real motives for a new backing band were of a different nature. "I wanted a set of musicians who answered to me and me alone," he wrote in his autobiography *Acts Of Faith*. The singer was getting increasingly frustrated with the three people who had so far successfully steered his career: Eve Taylor, Johnny Worth and John Barry. He regretted he had let himself be bullied and browbeaten by his manager Evie Taylor into recording the utterly schmaltzy

'Lonely Pup (In A Christmas Shop)' – even if the fans turned it into a #5 hit. Faith writes he wanted to be a bad boy, "the one the parents were frightened of". Taylor kept the golden goose in the golden pen, for instance by withholding a serious acting offer from Lindsay Anderson. Songwriter Johnny Worth had provided hit after hit but, to Faith's dismay, he was now scoring with other artists too. The cornerstone of the Faith edifice, however, was John Barry: composer, arranger, producer and leader of Faith's backing band The John Barry Seven. The man was becoming increasingly popular in various roles and would arrange the James Bond theme in '62. Understandably, a man of his stature couldn't invest all his talent in Faith alone.

Enter The Roulettes.

After the grand start at The Royal Albert Hall, Faith took his four new lads on a two weeks tour of England with The John Barry Seven, Irish comic Dave Allen, clarinettist Desmond Lane, Johnny Le Roy, and a host of other groups and entertainers. For the next 18 months, their life would be one long chain of summer seasons, variety, tours at home and abroad (Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong), radio and TV appearances. The line-up changed continuously in-between and during tours as Faith sacked musicians. Within weeks, he recruited and dismissed saxophonist Alan 'Honk' Jones and even pushed things as far as to replace the confident Peter Thorp, begging him to return a few days later. To Faith, seasoned rhythm guitarist and keyboard player Henry Stracey of Cheshunt instrumental group The Hunters "doesn't cut it". Such was Faith's status that he succeeded in convincing newly-recruited Shadows bassist John Rogers (who replaced Jet Harris) to join The Roulettes.

To cut a long story short, a steady group was in situ by spring '63: guitarist Peter Thorp (the only remaining original member), bassist John Rogers (The Hunters via The Shadows), drummer Bob Henrit and guitarist/keyboardist Russ 'The Kiddie' Ballard (both of Buster Meikle's Daybreakers). This line-up recorded 30-odd episodes of their 15-minute shows for Radio Luxemburg, sponsored by Ever Ready batteries. They canned six episodes per session at the station's own studios, each episode consisting of four songs with Adam and one without – often an instrumental, be it a hit or a new tune the guys had discovered themselves.

No sooner did the balance seem to working than John Rogers was killed in a car accident on his way to the next gig on 5th May. Under pressure to fulfil the upcoming gigs and with the summer season just weeks away, Faith wasted no time in recruiting a replacement. Enter John 'Mod' Rogan – 19, bass player (amongst other things) and founder member of Hartlepool beat darlings The Hartbeats. This line-up of Thorp, Henrit, Ballard and Rogan would last until the band broke up some four years later.

When Adam Faith decided to take up the challenge posed by Merseybeat as late as September '63, he had been absent in the Top 10 for about a year. Surprisingly, he was quite aware of rock 'n' roll and R&B. Russ Ballard: "Faith loved all that Ray Charles stuff. He used to get very excited about rock music, that's the thing he really, really loved. His second single was 'High School Confidential' and he loved that whole Eddie Cochran thing as is clear from 'Made You' from the movie *Beat Girl*. Basically, as luck would have it he was given a pop song in Buddy Holly style, so he went into Buddy Holly and 'What Do You Want' reached the pinnacle

of the charts. You should know that Adam Faith had the most fantastic record collection, cases and cases of albums from America: James Brown, Booker T, Marvin Gaye, Otis Redding, Smokey Robinson & The Miracles, the whole Gordy catalogue. We'd never heard of these people!"

Ever the business man and a trend follower, he counter-attacked with efficiency. His first move was to choose a new songwriter. From the abundant collection of songs by a young and eager Christopher Andrews, Faith and his management cherry-picked the tunes that were in line with the upbeat sound of the day.

Secondly, he decided to do without an orchestra and enter the studio with his Roulettes instead. From now on, labels, sleeves and posters read, "Adam Faith with The Roulettes". Russ Ballard: "The Roulettes weren't formed to deal with the Mersey sound, but when Merseybeat happened really big it was convenient he had a ready-made band to strike out."

The new direction paid off immediately. Chris Andrews' 'The First Time', credited to Adam Faith with The Roulettes reaches the #5 spot in

"When PR man Leslie Perrin was approached by Adam Faith's management to find a new touring band for Faith, Perrin put our name forward. We passed the audition. Our last gig as The Strangers was on Saturday 16th and the very next day we became The Roulettes, backing Adam Faith at The Royal Albert Hall!"

September. With Henrit's drums opening and closing the song, the stress on rhythm rather than lead guitar, strong harmonies and the vocal call-and-response so prominent in many early Beatles songs, perfectly crafted and faultlessly executed, it's as good as any other beat hit from the period.

The new strategy now also allowed The Roulettes to release records under their own name. True, they had recorded 'Hully Gully Slip 'n' Slide' in '62 but that Pye single doesn't really do them justice. Sharing both Faith's label Parlophone and his tunesmith Chris Andrews opened new opportunities. A mere two months after 'The First Time', the group's 'Soon You'll Be Leaving Me' was released.

In March '64 the band was given the opportunity to cut 'Bad Time', one of Chris Andrews' jewels. It opens with a plaintive "If you should walk right out of that door", with Henrit's drums falling in after a few syllables, underlining the drama and setting the mood in just a few seconds. Mod delivers a great vocal here and the guitar solo is pure R&B. It had as much hit potential as The Hollies' 'Just

One Look' and sounded as tough as The Mojos' 'Everything's Alright'.

"I was asked by Adam if I could write a song for his backing group The Roulettes," recalls Chris Andrews, "and that's how 'Soon You'll Be Leaving Me' came about. It was inspired by the Liverpool bands I had been working with at the Star Club in Hamburg. I wrote 'Bad Time' in the car in my head, so not sitting at the piano or playing guitar. I thought the opening line sounded quite strong and all the rest just followed. I remember I played it to the boys."

It should have been huge. John 'Mod' Rogan: "Yeah, that's what we think. I remember we were recording in Abbey Road studios and Maurice – our manager, Evie's husband – came out of the door and said 'Bad Time' is #47 boys!' and we thought that was it, something is going to happen. 'Bad Time' was definitely a hit record. It was commercial, it was dirty, it was of the era, it was exciting and it was well played. That's the beauty of it, that we could play well but still have the edge. We were extremely good playing artists, 'cause we played with a big star and everything had to be correct, to be perfect, so we learned that skill and it

came across our records. And 'Bad Time' had that edge."

Chris Andrews: "I have no idea why it wasn't a hit as the group sang and played it so well. I was at the session when they recorded it, I think I sang some backing vocals. The Roulettes were all very talented musicians but, as Gordon Mills once told me, 'You throw the pennies against the wall and hope they come up heads.'"


Soon after the Andrews magic seems to peter out as Faith has to settle for two minor hits in a row ('If He Tells You', 'I Love Being In Love With You'). The same fate befell The Roulettes. 'I'll Remember Tonight' is pure balladry with innocent lyrics and nice harmonies – a little upbeat, clocking in at under two minutes. Several groups had done well with soft and slow songs – think 'Someone, Someone' by Brian Poole & The Tremeloes or 'You're No Good' by The Swingin' Blue Jeans – but not so The Roulettes. Still, the flipside 'You Don't Love Me' proved again how good they were at rough R&B.

It was rough and tough R&B that brought them success too – in the USA of



THE ROULETTES

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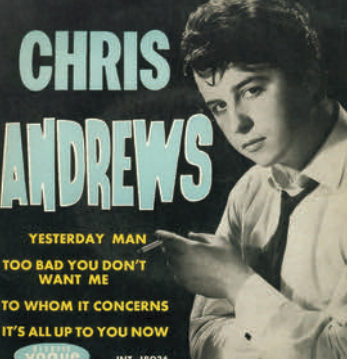
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Stackin' up. The Roulettes and extended family. Clockwise from top left: The Roulettes plug the virtues of Vox amps in *Beat Monthly*, June 1963; Adam Faith/Roulettes sheet music, '64 LP and press ad; 'Bad Time' writer Chris Andrews enjoys solo success; Bob Henrit, Peter Thorp, Russ Ballard, John 'Mod' Rogan and Adam Faith take some time out; the group is informed of the death of original bassist John Rogers, May '63; surprise US hit 'It's Alright'; 'The Long Cigarette' sheet music; Adam and The Roulettes appear on *Five O'Clock Club*, June 26th '64; the group's sole album, '65's *Stakes And Chips*

THE LONG CIGARETTE
 TOMMY MOELLER and BRIAN PARKER



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all places, a market that been both Faith and Roulettes-proof, British Invasion or not. Paradoxically, Faith himself delivered the vocals. 'I Love Being In Love With You' hid a wild Andrews song 'It's Alright' on its flipside. A blend of sped-up rock 'n' roll with R&B earthiness and haunting harmonica, it didn't sound like anything Faith and The Roulettes had recorded before. Several months after its initial UK release in May '64, it took off Stateside, eventually making it to a respectable #31 in the *Billboard* Hot 100, triggered by two appearances on the American television show *Shindig!* for Faith *sans* The Roulettes. Chris Andrews: "I think there was only one take. I played piano on this one, hitting a wrong chord on the intro, but no one seemed worried so it stayed in! It was so new I was still learning it myself in the studio – that's my excuse."

The first Adam Faith With The Roulettes LP, September '64's *On The Move*, also reflects the first signs of a musical gap developing between Faith and the group. All 14 songs are penned by Andrews, with one side each allotted to the group and The Johnny Keating Orchestra! Moreover, Faith entered the studio without The Roulettes to cut Bacharach & David's 'A Message To Martha' (AKA 'Kentucky Bluebird'). He was rewarded with a #12 hit. The Roulettes turned to the music they loved best and preferred to play on stage when performing without the boss: American R&B, Motown, soul. Regrettably, the impeccably-selected 'Stubborn Kind Of Fellow' and 'Tracks Of My Tears' didn't improve their chart profile.

These flops were counterbalanced somewhat when the second Faith/Roulettes album *Faith Alive!* went Top 20 in September, proving that rough and tough does pay off. It's a live-in-the-studio recording mixing classic R&R and R&B – 'Hi Heel Sneakers', 'Heartbreak Hotel' – with five songs by Chris Andrews (credited as an artist on the back sleeve), a Beatles cover ('I Wanna Be Your Man') and two songs written by group members.

Shortly afterwards, the old Cheshunt network would lead to that other milestone in the Roulettes catalogue, their single 'The Long Cigarette'. This is how it came about. One-time folk group Unit 4+2 was formed by ex-Hunter Brian Parker, who'd been in The Roulettes for a week or so depping for Peter Thorp, and Buster Meikle, formerly of The Daybreakers. Parker and Meikle asked ex-Daybreakers Bob Henrit and Russ Ballard to "help them out" on a new song being written by Parker and bandmate Tommy Moeller, the monster hit 'Concrete And Clay'. Parker and Moeller wouldn't repeat that feat, but The Roulettes happily accepted their new composition. Released in November '65, 'The Long Cigarette' was applauded by reviewers and deejays alike. For one thing, the listener could

Hit The Jackpot

THE ROULETTES' white-hot mod-jazz B-sides investigated

By 1965 The four Roulettes were able to write as a group and to improvise in the studio, which is how their three crowning instrumental B-sides 'Junk', 'Jackpot' and 'Yesterday, Today And Tomorrow' came about, with a little inspiration from one Booker T.

John 'Mod' Rogan: "Those B-sides were pretty good. 'Yesterday, Today And Tomorrow' technically is a very good tune. These three are an all-together thing, but they would come from Russ's instigation."

Peter Thorp: "If there was a keyboard, Russ would play around with ideas. He would probably write the tune and we then added our parts."

Bob Henrit: "We didn't start on these until we got in the studio and that's because of the Wurlitzer piano in Lionel Bart's music room at EMI."

Russ Ballard: "I remember we were in Studio 3 doing 'Yesterday, Today And Tomorrow', which is Booker T really, and our A&R manager John Burgess came in. He said, 'What's it called, what is it about?' and I replied we didn't have a title and he said, 'How about 'Yesterday Today and Tomorrow'?"

Bob Henrit: "I know that 'Junk' is revered - if that's the correct verb - revered amongst dance people and I don't know why. They play it in the clubs and I still don't know why. I do know it was well-played by us, but we wouldn't have spent too long on it in the studio 'cause we wouldn't have that much time to spend on a B-side. Maybe it took half an hour."

Peter Thorp: "I think 'Junk' probably is one of the best instrumentals, it has so much going for it. I've always thought it should've been the opening song of a detective series or something. That would have been fantastic, because it's a great song."

Russ Ballard: "I remember the influence was 'Aw Mercy', the B-side of Booker T's 'Green Onions. It had a Wurlitzer on it and they had a Wurlitzer in the Abbey Road studio."

"I think 'Junk' probably is one of the best instrumentals, it has so much going for it"



instantly identify with the lyrics picturing a common scene of teenage life: tinkering about uncertainty and insecurity, especially nagging doubts about your lover's loyalty and faithfulness. Moreover, 'The Long Cigarette' showed an unusual structure. Its ballad format is sustained by a strong beat throughout while being cut several times by the same short guitar sequence, resulting in a repetitiveness that sounds menacing as the anger and anxiety about a cheating lover grows.

Brian Parker (1940-2001) is no longer with us, but *Shindig!* located Tommy Moeller in Australia. He did well in the music world after Unit 4+2 folded and responded most favourably when asked some questions about his pop past.

"Brian and I wrote so many songs back then," he recalled, "usually when I got back from touring since he was no longer in the band for health reasons. I recall Brian and I writing the song – I wrote the lyrics – as a bit of fun, imagining a guy hoping he wasn't being stood up, nervously chatting to the barman. I wasn't at the recording session, but Brian played 'The Long Cigarette' to The Roulettes and I was only too pleased to hear their version and thought it was certainly chartworthy. I'm not sure but I think it had minor joy in Italy. The Roulettes were a very underrated band and deserved greater recognition. I regarded it a privilege to subsequently have Bob and Russ join Unit 4 Plus 2."

Whatever its merits, 'The Long Cigarette' spent a mere two weeks in the *Melody Maker* charts peaking at #40. It's little consolation, but the band are sure they know why. Peter Thorp: "Because of the cigarette thing, the BBC wouldn't play it."

At any rate, Bob Henrit and Russ Ballard would remain semi-official members of the Unit, eventually joining that group after the demise of The Roulettes.

November saw the release of the sole Roulettes album, *Stakes And Chips*. Despite its iconic cover photo of the group hunched over a roulette table, the record proved something of a missed opportunity, with new material vying for attention among previously released single sides.

Its lack of success proved a bitter pill to swallow, though not altogether unexpected. Bob Henrit attributes some of the blame to the group's reticence to speak out and air their feelings. "A&R and management would show us a song and we did it. Afterwards, they'd send us home and they'd mix it and it'd be out three weeks later. It sounds like exact science. Well, I suppose it was exact science."

Second, their manager's attentions remained primarily focussed on Adam Faith. Thorp: "We were never promoted on our own. The only time we *were* promoted on our own was probably one



“Our manager said **‘Bad Time’ is #47 boys!** and we thought that was it, something is going to happen. It was commercial, it was dirty, it was of the era, it was exciting and it was well played.

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TV appearance, if we released a single. We were always second to Adam, who was our manager Evie’s shining light.” Bob Henrit: “Lou Grade came to see Evie Taylor and said, ‘Listen I’m looking for a band for America, what about The Roulettes? And she allegedly said, ‘Sorry, The Roulettes are Adam Faith’s band.’ What happens next is that The Dave Clark Five became the next big thing in America. We don’t have any proof of that, but it does make sense that she would’ve done that.”

The Roulettes also put the blame on themselves. Peter Thorp: “We were a bit self-indulgent to be absolutely honest, showing off. We used to like to do stuff with Russell on the piano, we didn’t want to be a Mersey band thing. We were above it.”

John ‘Mod’ Rogan: “We should have put out ‘Twist And Shout’ as a single. I sang ‘Twist And Shout’ on stage and it’s the song I did when I auditioned for The Roulettes. But we decided not to and that was a big mistake, because Brian Poole did it and he had a #4 hit. Also, we should have done ‘Do You Love Me’. Again we didn’t do it and Brian Poole had a #1 a

few months later. It needed to be ‘Adam Faith With The Roulettes’ in order to sell records, because all these groups were making waves. In that sense, we never progressed. Otherwise we’d have been bigger than Adam and we’d have left.”

They didn’t, but it wouldn’t take long before Faith left them.


The partnership between Faith and The Roulettes was over once their boss went into repertoire. Faith’s teen idol years were definitely over. Free at last, The Roulettes did surprisingly little to profile themselves as an autonomous unit. In hindsight, their body of work was complete. Instead, they continued as a backing band, now for one of France’s most popular soft-rockers, Richard Anthony, with whom they toured France and several European countries.

The Roulettes switched to Fontana for two final singles in a more modish style, but neither made any ripples. They broke up in late ‘67 in the face of a shifting music scene and six years of hard slog having taken its toll. Peter Thorp, who had been with the group from day one (literally) and Mod, who’d joined last, left the music business (but

kept on playing, of course). Henrit and Ballard joined Unit 4+2 permanently, then co-founded Argent. Henrit eventually joined The Kinks for their ‘80s tours and Ballard embarked on a solo career combined with writing songs for others.

Their legacy? Rogan mentions “versatility”, Henrit “musicianship” and Ballard thought they were an exciting live band. Fans will judge the group by a different standard: that wonderful run of singles and the album *Stakes And Chips*, one of the archetypes of the beat era. They never shifted huge amounts of product, but their beat and R&B sounds true, honest and infectious, even now. Few acts of the era can boast a catalogue containing such gems as ‘Bad Time’, ‘The Long Cigarette’, ‘It’s Alright’, ‘Jackpot’ and ‘Junk’.

As interview time is about up, Mod throws up the most serious subject of the morning – a comparison with The Beatles, no less. John ‘Mod’ Rogan: “Could The Beatles have backed Adam Faith? I mean backed him like us?” To Peter, Russ and Bob, the answer is a clear “No”, the latter conforming with “I don’t think they had the experience.” All four agree on one possible exception. Bob Henrit: “The Shadows?” John ‘Mod’ Rogan: “The Shadows maybe, but there’s not many people.”

Followed by three nods... 

Sincere thanks to all four Roulettes: Peter Thorp, Bob Henrit, John ‘Mod’ Rogan and Russ Ballard. Also to Chris Andrews, Tommy Moeller, Fran Leslie, Garth Newton, Geoff Leonard, Stan Laundon and Ronnie Pollock