



ALTERED IMAGES

CLARE GROGAN ON THEIR FIRST ALBUM FOR 39 YEARS!



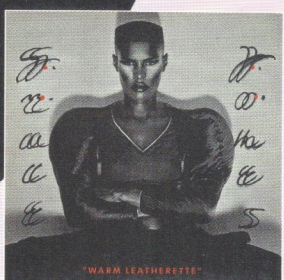
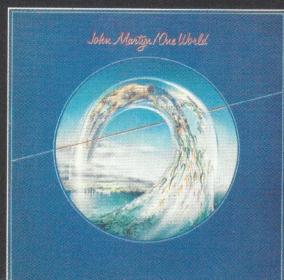
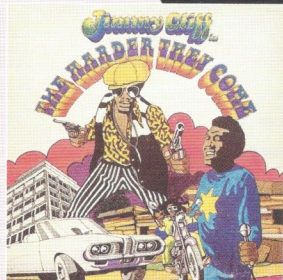
RECORD COLLECTOR

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STONES, JACK WHITE
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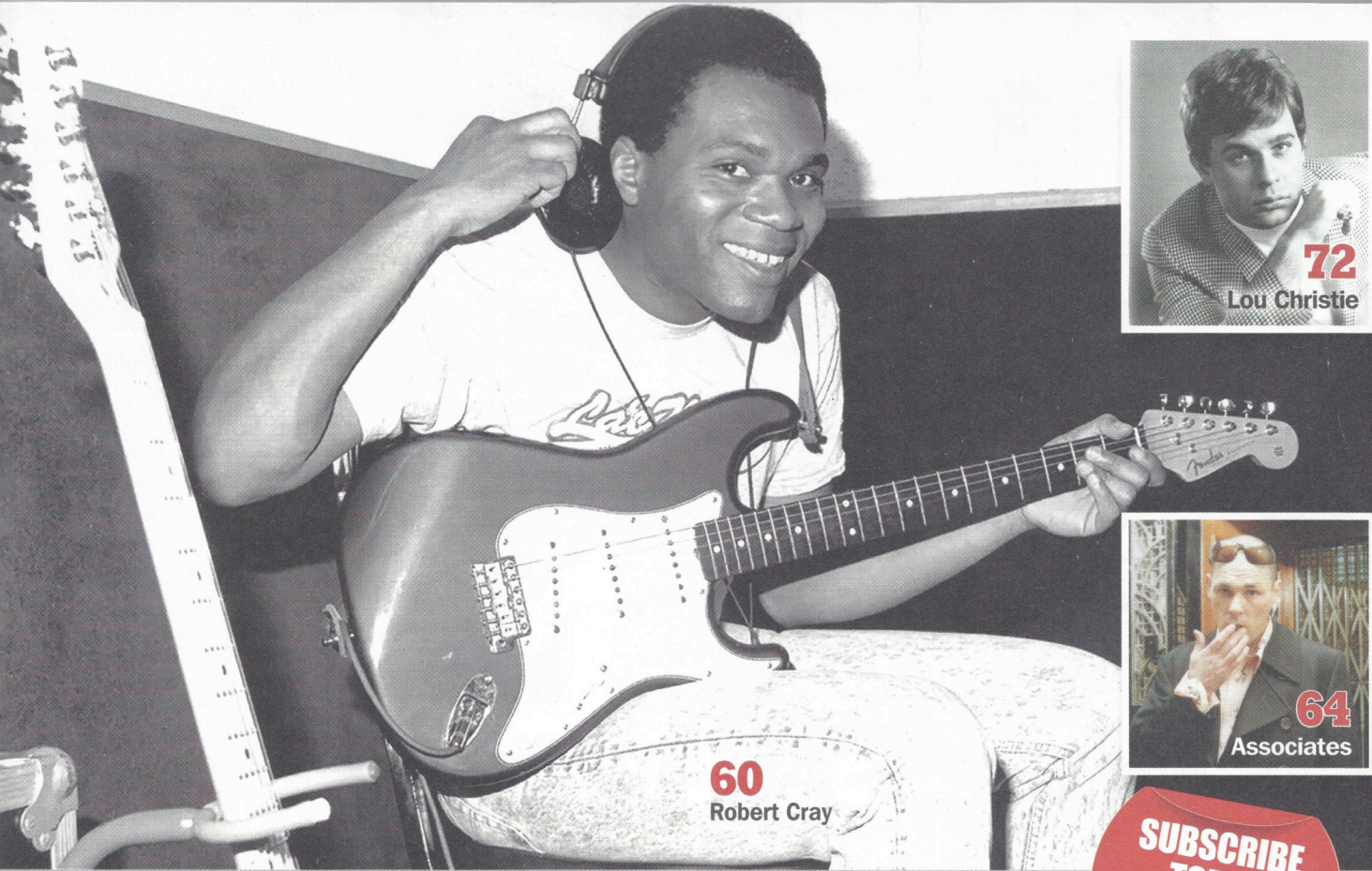


CHRIS BLACKWELL ON U2, BOB MARLEY, NICK DRAKE & THE ALBUMS THAT SHAPED THE LEGENDARY IMPRINT

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PRINCE OF WAILS



Lou Christie was the 60s superstar with the sensational multioctave vocal range, baroque approach to quasi-operatic pop, and Transatlantic hits such as *Lightnin' Strikes*, *She Sold Me Magic* and *I'm Gonna Make You Mine*. Then the clean-cut Italian-American kid grew his hair and delivered a countercultural classic, *Paint America Love*, to a largely perplexed response. **Bob Stanley** goes in search of the Pittsburgh Puccini.

Lou Christie has one of the most distinctive voices in American pop – his five-octave range and handful of million sellers dotted the 60s, from the pre-Beatles doo wop of *The Gypsy Cried* to the post-psych bubblegum of *I'm Gonna Make You Mine* – and he became known for one of the most exciting and energetic stage shows around. On record, he was produced and arranged by such greats as Jack Nitzsche, Bert Berns, Charles Calello and Jimmy Wisner. At the turn of the 70s, he married a former Miss UK and they moved to Hampstead, North London, across the street from Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. But his career would also be plagued by bad luck and some of the most specious characters in the record business. Talent will out, though, and Lou's biggest hits remain bulletproof.

Luigi Sacco grew up just outside Pittsburgh, a city that has always favoured hard-edged, dancefloor-friendly material, and he sang doo wop at school. With a voice like his, Lou was bound to attract attention, and he cut a handful of local 45s with his sister Amy and schoolfriends before striking gold when he met an unlikely companion – almost all his hit songs would be co-written with Twyla Herbert, the original gypsy woman, more than twice Lou's age when they met in 1962. Together they struck on a fascinating and unique style – part-doo wop, part-Puccini, part-Beach Boys, which can be discerned simply from a glance at some of the song titles: *Two Faces Have I*; *Self Expression* (*The Kids On The Street Will Never Give In*); *Back To The Days of the Romans*; *Genesis and the Third Verse*. These were daring productions that put female backing vocals right up front and weren't afraid to play drastically with conventional song structures as well as lyrics: check out the epic 1966 single, *If My Car Could Only Talk*.

Christie's hitmaking career would be split into several short bursts of success. First were his 1963 American hits, *The Gypsy Cried* and *Two Faces Have I*, cut in Pittsburgh, both of which sounded like *The Four Seasons* fed through a late 70s DIY filter. Three years later, Lou was back and bigger than ever with the unavoidably great *Lightnin' Strikes*, a US No 1 in 1966 that also nudged the UK Top 10, a libertine wail with a brass-and-falsetto chorus that remains his calling card. He followed it with *Rhapsody In The Rain*, which was banned then re-cut due to its suggestive lyric. Another three years elapsed before he returned with his biggest UK hit, the sweet, chewy bubblegum smash *I'm Gonna Make You Mine*, a UK No 2 and US No 10. A few months later, in early 1970, he had another UK hit with *She Sold Me Magic* – urgent and incomprehensible, it

became a massive hit in Japan. On a roll, in 1971 he wrote and recorded the *Paint America Love* album with Twyla, a state-of-the-nation masterpiece to rank alongside *What's Going On*.

Paint America Love bombed, and Lou went away to lick his wounds. Three more years elapsed, and he returned with another reflective album, grown-up and self-titled (also known as *Beyond The Blue Horizon*, after the included cover of Jeanette Macdonald's 1930 song of the same title; Lou's version would later feature in multiple film and TV soundtracks). The album acted as balm, blending country (*Saddle The Wind*), old-time hits (*Beyond The Blue Horizon*), and self-composed Americana like the astonishing *Blue Canadian Rocky Dream*.

Since *Beyond The Blue Horizon* there have been duets with Pia Zadora and Lesley Gore, a tribute album to Motown, a venture into proto-hip hop, and umpteen oldies tours. These days, he does podcasts on his favourite obscure oldies called *It Should've Been A Hit*.

I initially caught up with Lou at the (now-defunct) Fabulous Palm Springs Follies in California, where he was in residence. Having caught him off-guard – not too many suburban London accents in the merch queue that night – I vowed to one day catch up with him again.

50 years after the release of *Paint America Love*, and with the help of his uberfan and anthologist Harry Young, I managed to chat to Lou for an evening while he sat on the roof terrace of his *moderne* Manhattan pad.

“The very first song we wrote was a million-selling record!”

Did you grow up with music in the house?

My mother sang with a band. She sang like Peggy Lee, she had that kind of voice, she was great. I really believed that everyone could sing, because our whole family... my dad sang, my mother sang, my sister Amy sang. Amy was 18 months older;

she sang on my first album and did *The Gypsy Cried* with me, my first million selling record.

I wanted to ask you about Twyla Herbert, who co-wrote most of your songs, because I don't know a huge amount about her. Had she written songs before she met you?

Because she would have been in her late thirties by then...

She really played like a concert pianist. That's what she was. She taught music. And she was writing like... she didn't write anything rock'n'roll. She just wrote some little melodies. I was 15 and I had a

group, and we just did a capella stuff they want to they call doo wop, but it really wasn't doo wop. I was just writing on a little old organ that we had in the house, and begging my sister Amy: “Come on, you got to help me, sing background!”

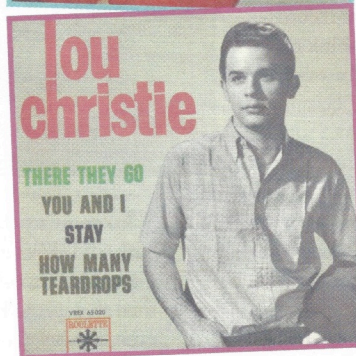
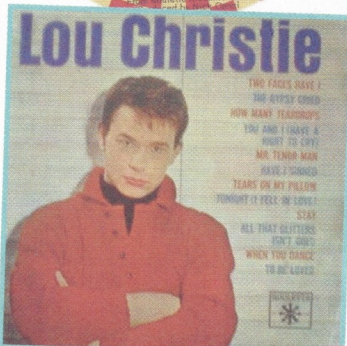
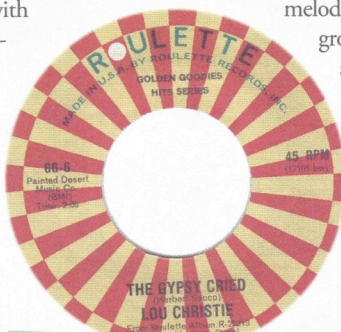
So, I had the group, always two boys and two girls. I walked into this audition in the basement of our church because they said there was going to be a record producer who's going to come in from New York. I thought, Oh God! So, I got my kids together, my four friends, and we went down there, we sing a couple of little songs that I wrote, you know, and we would just do them a cappella. I walked in and I saw this woman. I said, ‘Oh, my God... who is this?’ I thought she must be from New York City because she had this Emerald shining green dress on, and her hair was a flaming red like Lucille Ball and big Gypsy loop

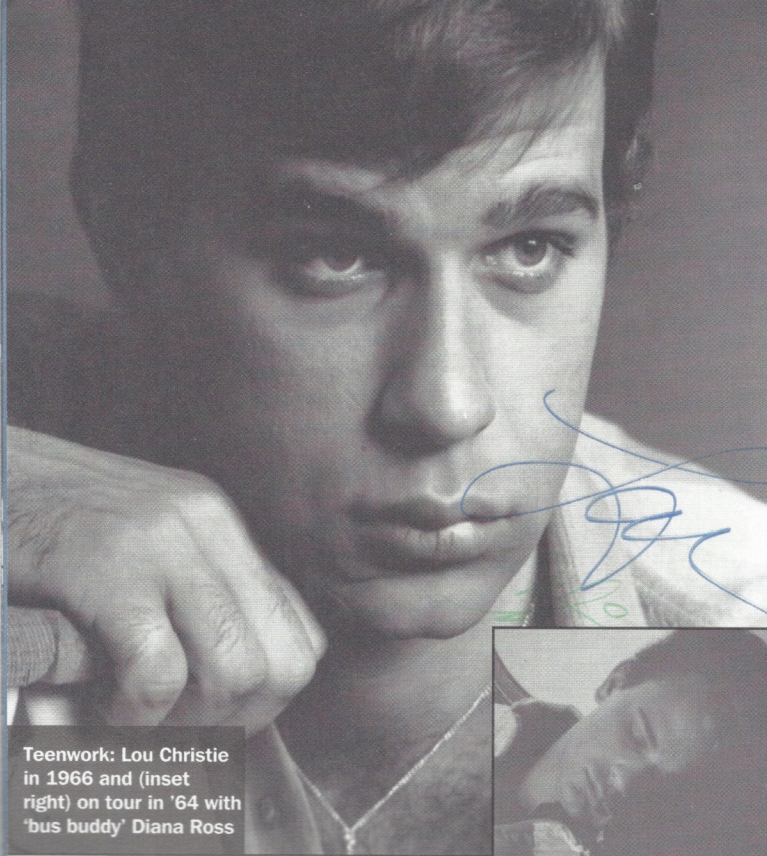
earrings. She was so attractive while I was like, and I thought, ‘Oh! She's so New York!’

Well, I found out she lived up on the hill, only about four miles away from where I was raised on a farm. And she always wanted to be a concert pianist – she could memorise 150 pages of Chopin, that kind of thing. And she knew nothing about rock'n'roll. But when we got together, the first time we sat down at that damn piano, that was it. I didn't get up for 40 years. The very first song we wrote, in 15 minutes, was *The Gypsy Cried*, a million-selling record! I had to figure out, how do I get into a studio to do this now? And I did. The whole damn record I think cost about \$300 to record. Twyla's daughter sang background, my sister sang background...

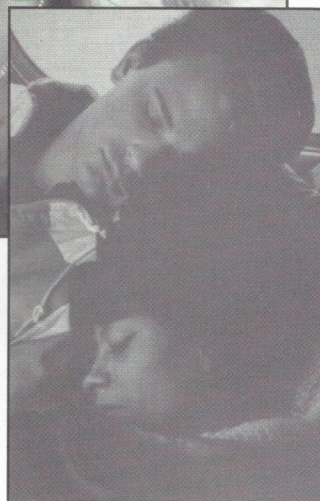
The backing vocals on those early records are so distinctive.

When Twyla and I wrote the songs, we also wrote the background. That's why my records are so filled up with sassy girls barking and yelping and harmonising with me, 'cause I love the crazy sound of it. It just works for me. I think the girls are just as important in all of my records as I am, you know? And I was jumping in. I always jumped in the background, to do





Teenwork: Lou Christie in 1966 and (inset right) on tour in '64 with 'bus buddy' Diana Ross



I went around to as many stations as I could. I had my dad drive me sometimes.

Co & Ce used to distribute all these people like Scepter, Motown, Atlantic, and they were friends with Morris Levy of Roulette Records... and that was Frankie Lymon And The Teenagers, The Flamingos, that kind of thing.

Great, great, great records. So, Morris Levy said, "Give me the record and I'll see what I can do with it." And the damn thing started taking off all around the country. All of a sudden, I had a million-selling record: my very first song, the first record I put out as Lou Christie.

Oh, my bus buddy, Miss Diana Ross. I was on with Brian Hyland, I was on with Gene Pitney, Johnny Tillotson, The Orlons, The Crystals, The Supremes, The Drifters, Ruby and the Romantics – anyone who was in the Top 20 in America. I'd been running home from school to see this show, *American Bandstand*, and I was there all of a sudden. I'm still friends with everyone... I just spoke to Brian Hyland yesterday. And Chris Montez and Del Shannon: we were all friends. It was my graduating class. I've known them since I was 16.

Those tours sound pretty intense.

I don't think I could do that kind of scheduling now, because we would travel every night on the bus, sitting up on the bus. Diane [sic] and I was there sleeping on each other's shoulders, which was the best part as far as I was concerned, because I knew she was going to be a monster star. Before Berry Gordy knew it. She just had a magic that just was beyond something... I was smitten by her totally, and she was just a nice, great person. It's funny because last week I found this piece of paper that she gave me the last time we were on tour together, with her address and phone number on.

Roulette were notorious for their mob connections. How did you manage to get out of your contract?

When I turned 21, I just said, I'm outta here, and I just took my chance. The details are very, very involved and still hard to get into because... a lot of the guys there, they weren't fooling around. They were making money with me. And Morris Levy was always threatening people. Being Italian, my father didn't want to get involved with that type of thing, because he had four little kids. I thought, this is too dangerous for them to even think about. I was cheated out of all my money at this point, but it just was not in my dad's genes to get involved.

You were in the army before *Lightning Strikes* came out on MGM in late 1965...

Yeah, the reserves, like a six-month thing. I got in and I got out as fast as I could. We didn't even know what the hell Vietnam was at that point. You kept hearing about it – they said, "Oh, well, they're gonna send people in" and I had a six-month thing. Everyone was writing letters for me, from Dick Clark down the line, to try to hold me back from going to the army, but I had to. So, when I got out I was back on the road again, and had so much more success.

***Lightning Strikes* was a No 1 in the US three years after your last Top 10 hit there, which was quite an achievement.**

Al Kooper said he used to set his alarm clock – every couple of years I'd have another hit record! Here comes Lou Christie again!

Your time at MGM was probably your most sustained period of success.

Absolutely, because *Rhapsody In The Rain* came after *Lightning Strikes*. *Rhapsody* was banned, and then I was living in Hollywood,

the high parts mostly – it was so much fun. We just laughed all the time. And I was so glad I didn't try to make records like anyone else, you know? I think of the pros and cons of trying to be original all the time. You pay the price, because not many people could sing those songs. I was locking myself into singing these things in three octaves and so, as a writer, there was not many people who could cover my records. So, I was glad they were hits. My life has been extremely interesting!

How did you get a record company interested?

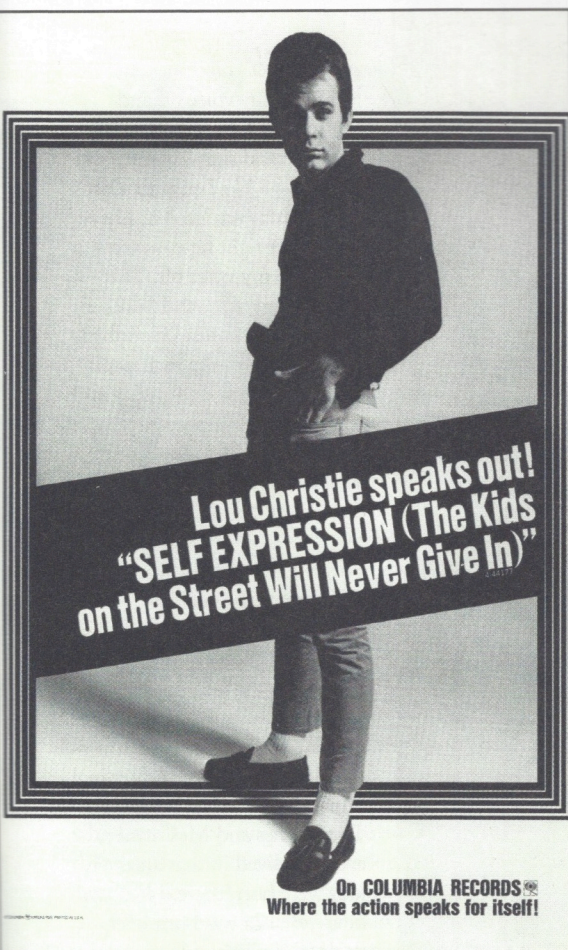
I knocked on a door in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There was a little record company that distributed a lot of records that came from New York City, because you could bust a record out of Pittsburgh and Cleveland, which is only a couple hundred miles away, or Philadelphia – that's how you could get your record done. So, the guy pressed our record up on the Co & Ce label. And I would go around and sing at record hops, doing the record, and then someone put me on television.

Who came up with the name?

They did. My real name is Luigi Alfredo Giovanni Sacco. So, I was Lou anyhow. And then they picked the name Christie. I didn't even like it. I thought that it would be hip to go under one name. But my dad said, "You're gonna have luck with this because Christ is in the name." He was a real old Italian. And talk about luck! I just haven't stopped since then, you know. Two Faces Have I was another million-seller, I did the first album in Pittsburgh, and then I was on Dick Clark's *Caravan Of Stars*. I got calls from all over the country, I was on *American Bandstand*...

Who else was on the *Caravan Of Stars* tours with you?





because I was being managed by Bob [Marcucci]. Bob used to handle Fabian and Frankie Avalon. They left at different times, but they all lived in the same house out there in California. It was a Frank Lloyd Wright house. Oh, it was just great. We all lived in that house at some point. There was always something going on pretty crazy, and I think Dick Clark's *Dr. Pepper Show* was shot there, in the living room and by the pool. Annette Funicello was in that show. Johnny Mathis stopped by because he lived close by; Jackie De Shannon may have been there.

Did Twyla move to LA with you?

No, she had a little girl at the time. She flew out and we did some recordings there. We did really great stuff with Jack Nietzsche who did all of the Phil Spector records, he was the arranger for The Righteous Brothers, The Ronettes, The Crystals, and the Wrecking Crew. We cut *If My Car Could Only Talk*, she and I wrote that. And *Song of Lita*, we got real gypsies playing violins, we had them come into the studio and play. And then we did *Watch Your Heart After Dark*. That was another one with Jack Nietzsche. Twyla flew out and stayed at Bob's house, too. We used to ride around Hollywood in my little red MG, a little flash. But I had no time to show off or do anything. I was so concerned about the next record all the time, like, 'Oh my god, what are we gonna write for the next thing?'

How did you end up going to Columbia from MGM?

Because of my friend [and arranger] Charlie Callelo. Charlie went to Columbia. He was having a zillion hits with the Four Seasons,

every friggin' record. And then Engelbert Humperdinck, *After The Love*, *Cherchez La Femme*, *Native New Yorker*... all that stuff. So, Charlie went to Columbia and he started cutting Laura Nyro there, and I went to all of those sessions with Laura Nyro, and she used to roll joints as big as my, err, thumbs. I mean, she was incredible. I said, "Charlie! Every one of these songs this girl's writing is going to be a hit." I said, I've got to record one and he said, "Don't worry..." Then *Stoned Soul Picnic* came out, *Wedding Bell Blues* came out, it was too late. I was like, 'Oh, Charlie!'... I could not believe the talent that woman had. But I went because Charlie was at Columbia and Clive Davis signed me. Then Clive didn't get along with Stan or something like that.

This was Stan Polley, who was managing you by now...

They would get in into these fights, stupid business bullshit. And the artist is sitting there, trying to figure out what to do next. You do an album, then all of a sudden, they're arguing, and you got to almost start over. And you think, I can't, this was the best stuff I've written in my life.

I read that you recorded some 20-odd songs for Columbia, but almost no one has heard them, only a handful were released.

I hated it. I just hated it. I always wanted to be

I was spending a lot of time in England, and that was nice. Wales, Scotland and England, TV shows, *Top Of The Pops*... Very nice.

Did you get to visit Japan? *She Sold Me Magic* was huge there in 1970...

In Japan it was No 1 for longer than any other record! But I never got there because I was too busy. You know they never released *She Sold Me Magic* in America? That's how dumb and stupid the company [Buddah] was. You're up against everyone in the company who thinks they know, and they really don't most of the time. They didn't understand what I was trying to do and move forward with *Paint America Love*, because FM radio was totally different, it was starting to change – protesting about the Vietnam War, the shooting at Kent State and all that stuff. And that's why I wrote

Paint America Love, because it was so bad. And it's getting such a response now. More of a response.

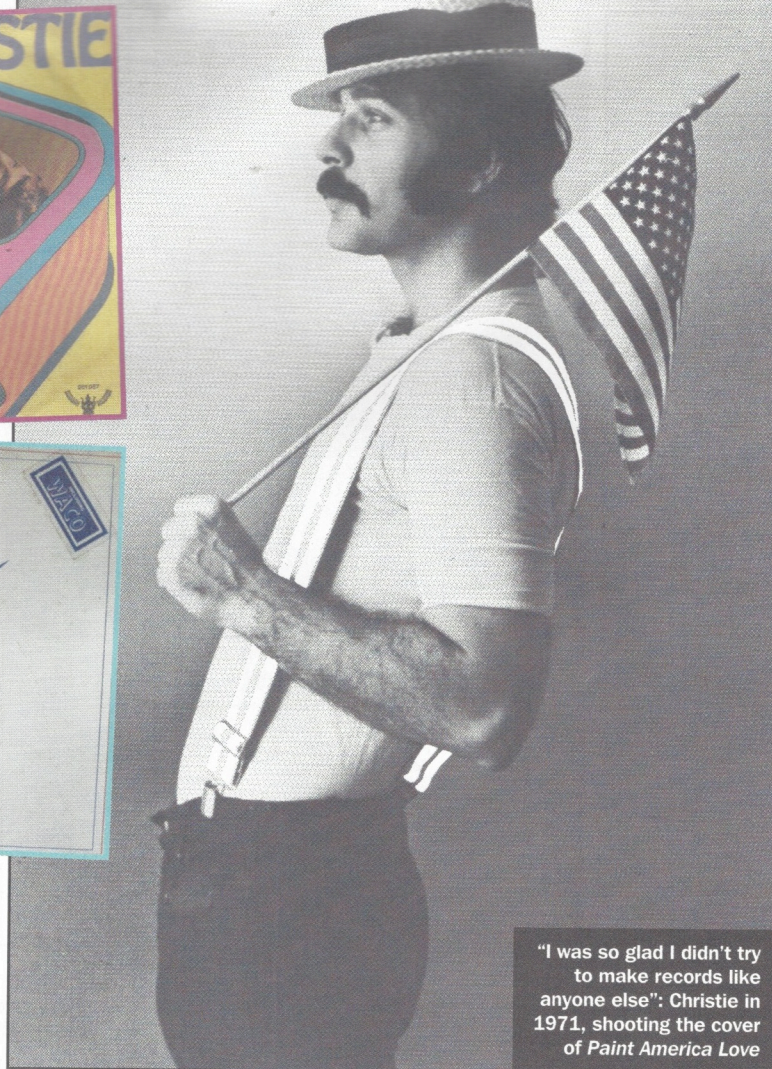
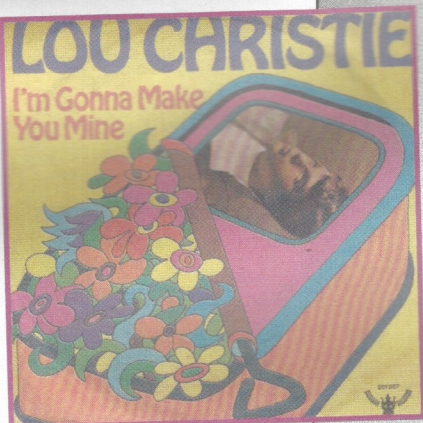
Can we talk more about *Paint America Love*? I think it's an amazing record. Thank you. They couldn't even get it.

They were, like, why? Where's the hit?

I can hear hits on it!

Waco got banned because I said, "You got six more brownies left to get to Ontario" and by that they thought I meant hash brownies.

"There were no rules when I came into the business"



"I was so glad I didn't try to make records like anyone else": Christie in 1971, shooting the cover of *Paint America Love*

It could have been hash brownies, but that's how bad it was. They said the kids were rebelling in the streets, everyone was stoned, smashed... so [Buddah's promotions man] Neil Bogart wrote this letter. He said, "This is ridiculous. You're banning this record because it had that line?"

Another potential hit was Chuckie Wagon, which came out as a single in Japan. What exactly is a Chuckie Wagon?

There was a family in our little town, their house burned down and so my dad took them in; he was such a great person. He had 100 acres of land, so he gave them an acre of land and built them a house. Their father had passed away, you know, died in the fire. And my dad built the house and gave it to them. Chuckie was a little older than me, he was always building something. We had goats, and he built them a wagon, like a chariot wagon, and the goats would pull me in the wagon. So, it was all about memories of Chuckie, growing up on a farm with us and him being my best friend. He still lives in the house my dad built.

That was probably 65, 70 years ago. And there's still a plaque on the front of the door dedicated to his father.

Were you and Twyla still writing together in the same way on *Paint America Love*?

Every note. It was so involved. Very classical, in a way. Buddah didn't seem to do anything with it. They just weren't in tune with it. They were in tune with [Ohio Express's] Yummy Yummy Yummy, 45 [rpm] records that you just dance away to for three minutes and that's it. But time was moving on. They wanted me to keep that teenage idol thing and I didn't think that's where it should have been going.

Did you think about doing another album in the same vein as *Paint America Love*?

Well, at that point... that's when I got so fed up I moved to England. I threw my keys in the garbage and I took off.

What made you leave America?

I left because I was so disheartened by the things that were going on around me. Before I left, I cut a record called *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*. We all had a feeling it was gonna be a hit. My manager got in a fight with the guy who ran Buddah Records, Neil Bogart. Stanley [Polley] wanted another couple of pennies on each record because this thing was going to be a smash. Well, he got into a fight with Neil Bogart, and Neil said, "Well, fuck you, we're

taking Lou's voice off." And they took my voice off and put Robert John's on because Robert could sing like me. And it became a No 1 record. That's my record: I recorded it, I have the master right here – except they took my voice off. That was the end of it. And I said, 'Goodbye, America.' Goodbye, because guys in the rock'n'roll business were just so greedy and so horrible. I said, 'Fuck off. I'm leaving.' And I went over to England and got married. I didn't come back for two years.

So, you were living in London in the early 70s. How did you find it?

I got married in Golders Green. I met my wife in Birmingham at the La Dolce Vita [club]. I lived in Hampstead for a couple years. I loved it. Sterling! Super! And everyone was there: The Hollies and McCartney, everyone lived in that area. My kids were born there. I had two kids – Bianca was born over there, and Christopher.

Did you hang out with your neighbours much?

I was always working. I worked a lot in England because of my

agent Barry Marshall. He handles McCartney now, and he did Tina Turner and Lionel Richie and everything. I learned a lot while I was in England, playing some of those working man's clubs. I wasn't just a tight pair of pants – I had to be more than that. I had a brass section and two girls over there; they had come over from Australia with Olivia Newton John. You know, I've been writing stories about all the things that have happened, like the Badfinger thing, which was very sad, and that whole thing with Stan Polley and Five Arts.

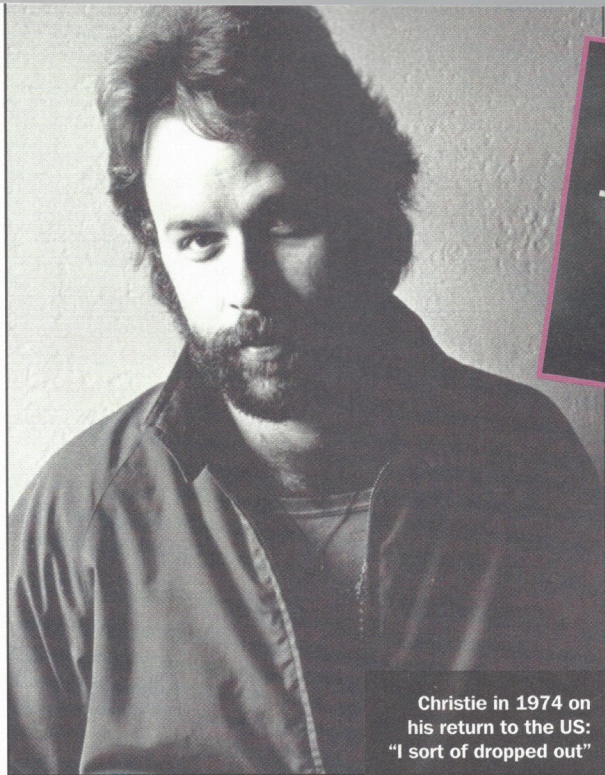
What happened with Five Arts?

There were five of us that were partners. One was Al Kooper, one was Charlie Callo, and our company managed Badfinger, that was the whole idea. But what happened is Stan Polley, the real creep who really stole and fucked us all over, he took the money and that was the end of it. He was indicted with a Supreme Court judge – the whole situation was front page, *New York Times*. And that was the end of our company. It was supposed to go public, and that was the end of it, because he took all of our money. We even had the publishing on stuff like *Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round The Ole Oak Tree*, we owned the publishing on the *Four Seasons*... None of us retrieved our money. And that's when Peter Ham committed suicide, and then Tom Evans committed suicide. It was just terrible.

How did you find out what was going on?

I was sitting there watching television and all





Christie in 1974 on his return to the US: "I sort of dropped out"



Think about it! [Debbie Harry might want to query this – Ed] It was a great record, about the guardian angels on the subway in New York. We used great R&B studio musicians.

Where did the idea come from?

Walking around, I got that bassline going in my head and I just called my phone and left it on my answering machine. That was a good record. Very street. Rapping was basically brand new at that point. I thought, well, if this is where the record business is gone, you know?

Are there other gems like that in the vaults? Or the trunks?

Some of my best work no one has ever heard. I was just cleaning out some of my stuff downstairs. I have stuff Twyla and I wrote, you know, 'cause we wrote every blinkin' day we could, whether it was Christmas – didn't matter! We just wrote and we laughed the whole damn time. Never a disagreement.

It can be hard to keep on top of your archive if it's not organised.

It's getting out of hand! You think, what the hell are we gonna do with this stuff in these trunks? I know I have I have a wonderful letter somewhere, from when I was asked to do the [Royal] Command

Performance, when I was in England. I did it for Princess Margaret and Lord Snowden. I did a couple of those, with The Supremes, Four Tops – we did the Albert Hall. There's this letter from Leonard Bernstein, which was really cool because he did *West Side Story* and he conducted the Met... and he loved the *Paint America Love* album. Someone gave it to him, and he thought it was brilliant. **RC**

Self Expression – The Complete Columbia Recordings is due out on Ace later this year.

Did you think of the *Beyond The Blue Horizon* album as something to help you get yourself back together, in the way Brian Wilson did with *Smiley Smile* and *Friends*?

Exactly. Yeah, yeah... because I didn't want to 'ay ay ay' [falsetto] myself to death! I was growing up, and these were just some wonderful songs that could live in your heart forever. It's one

of the best thought-out albums that I did, and that was going to be what I did when I came back to America. But things changed so much...

When I started performing again, it was the oldies that started me back. Richard Nader [promoter] said, "I'm putting together a show at Madison Square Garden, it's Chuck Berry and Lesley Gore," and he named all these people. I thought, oh, my God, people are not gonna remember me. Well, it was 20,000 people, and it was like I walked into the boxing ring like Rocky. Lesley Gore and I closed the concert with *Since I Don't Have You* and *It's Only Make Believe*. She and I then started doing concerts all over the country. I haven't stopped since. That was 1980.

A year after that you made a single called *Guardian Angels*, which was quite a departure – an early rap record, with producer Ray Reid who was in *Crown Heights Affair*.

I was the first white person who ever rapped.

"I was the first white person who ever rapped!"

of a sudden his name comes up: "Stan Polley, who handles pop singer Lou Christie..." And that was the end of our corporation called Five Arts. Then after I came back to the States with my wife and two children, I found that I had no money. That was pretty heavy.

Is it true that you worked on an oil rig, and as a truck driver for a while?

I sort of dropped out. I just hung out with a lot of people down in Lake Charles, Louisiana, because that's the first place we moved after we came back. I had to try to regroup, try to become *normal*, whatever the hell that meant. So, we all moved down to Lake Charles: the kids, my wife, and Ian, my brother-in-law – he's from Lewisham. He knew the Kray brothers, He was a real lad. I just had to take time off and try to figure out where I was going.

Did you ever find anyone at a record label who understood what you were trying to do?

Please! The only person that I ever worked with who understood what I was doing was Tony Romeo [writer of *I'm Gonna Make You Mine*, *Waco*, and *Blue Canadian Rocky Dream*]. Tony and I had the same musicality because he was raised in the same kind of family that I was raised in, with the Italian melodies and these things. We did *Beyond The Blue Horizon*, which was such a big record, especially when it went into so many films: *Rain Man* with Tom Cruise and Dustin Hoffman. We cut an album; it was so damn good... We did a lot of stuff using my voice in a more mature way, like *Saddle The Wind*, *Wheel Of Fortune*, and a tribute to people who worked on the Grand Ole Opry. We brought the album out and, no more than three days later, the company [Three Brothers Records] went bankrupt! But people just found this record. When they put it on in *Rain Man*, it just started making people more aware, and it's been in a Kathy Bates movie, on the Travel Channel for two years as their theme song. It just never dies. It's my standing ovation.

LOU CHRISTIE SELECT DISCOGRAPHY

63	Columbia DB 4983	The Gypsy Cried/Red Sails In The Sunset	£10
63	Columbia DB 7031	Two Faces Have I/All That Glitters Isn't Gold	£10
63	Columbia DB 7096	How Many Teardrops/You And I (Have A Right To Cry)	£10
66	MGM MGM 1297	Lightnin' Strikes/Cryin' In The Streets	£15
66	MGM MGM 1297	Lightnin' Strikes/Cryin' In The Streets (DJ Copy)	£50
66	MGM MGM 1308	Rhapsody In The Rain/Trapeze	£5
66	MGM MGM 1317	Painter/Du Ronda	£6
66	MGM MGM 1325	If My Car Could Only Talk/Song Of Lita	£20
66	Colpix PX 735	Merry Go Round/Guitars And Bongos	£10
67	King KG 1036	Outside The Gates Of Heaven/All That Glitters Isn't Gold	£8
67	CBS 2718	Shake Hands And Walk Away Cryin'/Escape	£15
67	CBS 2922	Gina/Back To The Days Of The Romans	£10
66	MGM MGM-C(S) 8008	LIGHTNIN' STRIKES (LP)	£25
66	Colpix PXL 551	STRIKES AGAIN (LP)	£25