

Interview Peter Brummund with Chris Farlowe 12.10.2017

Peter Brummund:

So, I think we are on air now. OK, yes. I've prepared some questions Chris, so it would be nice if you could answer them.

Chris:

Yeah, I'll do my best to answer them.

PB

It won't last more than an hour.

Singing was always part of your life. While you sang, your mother played the piano. What role did your father play in your life?

Chris:

Not a lot. My dad was a soldier from the Second World War and as you know, when you're fighting for your country and times are bad, especially with the bombing of London, and my mother of course. He was away in the army and of course he was worried about his newborn son, you know and my mum as well. But I never really knew my dad. He came back after the war, about 6 years and my mum said, 'This is your father.' And of course I just said, 'Oh, hello.' But because he was a military policeman, he had that sort of hard streak. He was quite a strict man. If I did anything wrong, he would take off his army leather belt and smack me across the arse, you know. But they say, you know, being violent towards people, leads you to become violent and it never did with me. It taught me to respect my family, you know. So, that's what happened there.

PB:

OK. The first manager you had (for you and the Thunderbirds) was Pat Robinson. Afterwards there were many more managers. Rick and John Gunnell, Barry Parker and Chris Gray. How was your relationship with these managers?

Chris:

Oh, good question. Well, I don't call them 'managers', I call them 'damagers'. Yes, some of them were good. Even if they were bad sometimes, you know, you needed (them) at the time of your career when you were nothing. They were willing to put money up behind you and say, 'Let's push Chris Farlowe,' you know, although they took that money back from my records and everything. But they still did it in the first place, you know and so I can only respect them for helping me along up the ladder of success. But usually, at the end, when you're earning good money, then they can become different.

PB: I can imagine. They want more, exactly.

Chris:

They want more.

PB:

Do you have the impression after all that they took the majority of the money and put it into their pockets, rather than into yours?

Chris:

I'm sure they did. I remember doing a concert once. It was in Cornwall and we were going in the van and Rick Gunnell said, 'You don't have to pick the money up. There's no money to pick up. It's a cheque.' And the cheque was for 350 Pounds. And I said 'OK.' He said, 'But they won't give it to

you. They'll send it to us and then we'll pay you and the boys the wages,' you know. I said, 'OK.' So we got to Cornwall and we did the gig and I finished the gig and went in the dressing room and a man came in and said, 'Oh fantastic,' he said. 'Fantastic crowd tonight, thousands of people. They loved you, you know.' I said 'OK.' He said, 'Right, I might as well pay you for tonight.' I said, 'Oh they said it wouldn't be paid.' 'No,' he said, 'I might as well pay you,' you know. So he gives me 850 Pounds – 500 Pounds more than what they told me, you know.

PB

So they always put the difference into their own pockets.

Chris:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Chris:

So I said, 'Right, OK, thank you, sign there.' So I went back the next day to the office and I said, 'Oh by the way, I picked the money up from that gig last night,' and he said – Rick Gunnell said, 'Oh did you?' And I said, 'Yeah and I might as well give it to you, cos I don't want to carry it around.' So I gave them 350 Quid.

PB laughs

Chris:

They never said a word!

PB

But that's how you discovered

Chris:

... the managers, yeah

PB

.... how they were making their money.

Chris:

Even the Beatles, they got ripped off. Everyone gets ripped off in their career, you know.

PB

Yes, I can imagine.

Chris:

It's the way it goes, you know.

PB

Unfortunately.

Chris:

Yeah,

PB

So the artist should get the money and not the manager?

Chris:

Yes, absolutely.

PB

You initially did an apprenticeship as a carpenter for several years and worked in that profession for 5 years. They say you were fired because you used to sing at work. Is that correct?

Chris:

I sang every time. You know, you're working in a carpenter's shop and then, 'Bop, Bop, Tooty fruity' you know and the manager said, 'Come here. Can you not sing? (= Please don't sing). And I said, 'No, I want to sing.' and then he said, 'OK' and I left it. Another week 'Rip it out, bah, bah, bah!' And then he said, 'If you continue singing, we'll have to fire you.' And I said, 'Oh I want to become a singer,' and he said, 'You do?' And I said, 'Yeah I wanna become a singer. One day I'm gonna be famous.' They said, 'Oh yeah? OK' Anyway, so they fired me.

PB

But you did this job for 5 years.

Chris:

I became a I passed all my examinations and I was in the carpentry from say when I left school – that's yeah 5 years.

PB

5 years. But you made the better career as a musician.

Chris:

Yeah.

PB

You started performing in Germany early in the sixties.

Chris:

1962

PB:

OK.

PB

You particularly like Hamburg and have often performed there. What do the city of Hamburg and the German public mean to you?

Chris:

Oh well, I love.... Course we've had a lot of success here with the German public. Especially with 'Colosseum' - they were massive here, you know. They like me as well. I know I'm a good singer and they like my voice, you know. So that's good. But I love Hamburg. I mean when I first arrived here, it was pretty badly destroyed, as you can imagine. But they've always been kind to me, they've always drawn me here and of course the connection with the Beatles as well is very good for me, you know. They weren't called the Beatles then. I think they were called 'The Quarrymen' when I first knew them. Yeah, so I love Hamburg. It's a lovely city.

PB

Does it also remind you of England? Because I think Hamburg is the most British town, so British

people might feel very good being in Hamburg.

Chris:

Yeah. I don't It feels to me like it's a German big city – a national city. It's funny, when I went to Germany in 1962 to do that club and the one in Gießen, I told my mum, 'I'm going to Germany for 2 months.' She said, 'What you doing there?' I said, 'I'm singing with a band.' 'Oh,' she said, 'Where?' I said in Hamburg and Gießen. Oh, you won't know where that is, but it's Germany. And she said to me, 'Have you told your father you're going?' And I said, 'I haven't.' 'Oh,' she said, 'You better go and see your father.' So I walked in and I said, 'Dad, I've been offered 2 months work abroad.' And he said, 'Oh, right. Where are you going?' And I said, 'Germany.' He sort of looked at me and said, 'Where?' I said, 'Germany.' He said, 'Why?' 'Because that's where they want us to go - Hamburg.' 'No, he said, 'I don't like that.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'They're Nazis there'.

PB

'They are my enemies.'

Chris:

Yeah, cos he was a fighter, you know – a soldier.' I said, 'Dad, the war's over now.' 'No, he said, no matter what you say, there are going to be Nazis.' I said, 'Well I'm 21 now. I can do as I want to do.' And I did it and I'm glad I did.

PB

And thank God that the war is over and there is a much better understanding between the different countries and the people.

Chris:

Absolutely.

PB

What made you hope that the breakthrough of the Thunderbirds with Albert Lee and Dave Greenslade at Columbia was just around the corner?

Chris:

Yeah, well my first record label was Decca, Air Travel, as you know and then we formed the Thunderbirds, early Thunderbirds, not with Albert, much earlier than that. 1961 we formed the Thunderbirds. Albert came in about '65, something like that, '64. But I knew he just walked up to me in the street in the West End while we were playing the Flamingo Club and he said, 'Oh, I'm Albert Lee.' And I said, 'Oh, hello, how are you doing?' Didn't know who he was. He said, 'I'm looking for a job.' I said, 'What do you do?' He said, 'I play the guitar.' I said, 'Well when we're on stage tonight, come up and play a song with us.' Anyway, he came up and started playing and I thought ...

PB

Unbelievable!

Chris:

Where's this guy from, you know. I said, 'You got the job.' And he was with me for 4 years. But then they formed the 'Colosseum' – well Dave did and Jon Hiseman had the band and he had Clem as a singer and guitarist. Clem has not got a powerful voice, it's quiet. Jon said to Dave, 'We've got to have someone to give it a fucking push,' you know. 'Why don't you try Chris Farlowe?' Jon didn't know who I was and he said, 'Can you get him down here?' Anyway, I got down there and sang a couple of songs and Jon said, 'You've got the job.'

PB

That's part of another question. I'll come to it later. Columbia took 'Buzz with the Fuzz' off the market. What caused the record company to stop the sale of the title?

Chris:

Yeah, well it was anti-police at that time, you know. Well we weren't anti-police really. 'I was rolling up a joint at a place last night.' Yeah, in 1963, or 4 or 5 'I was rolling up a joint!' I mean you mustn't say that on a record.

PB

It wasn't a protest song?

Chris:

Yeah, it was a protest about the police. 'Why didn't you say you were rolling up a cigarette at a place last night?' I said, 'No that doesn't sound right.' So that's why they took it off.

PB

You were still under contract at Columbia when your classic 'Stormy Monday' was released by Sue Records under the pseudonym 'Little Joe Cook' . What motivated you to record 'Stormy Monday' of all songs and where does the odd name 'Little Joe Cook' come from? It makes you think of an American soul singer.

Chris:

A blues singer, yeah. Well, we did a recording session for Chris Blackwell, Island Records – Bob Marley's manager, you know. And while they were doing something, they said, 'Why don't you just play something?' I said, 'OK Albert – Stormy Monday'. 'Oh,' they said, 'that's good. We've got that, yeah. Now let's do something else.' And then about 6 months went by and I went to my local record shop called 'Star Records'. I'm standing there and I hear 'Stormy Monday'.... 'That's me!' The woman said, 'You?' I said, 'Yeah, what is this record?' And she said, 'It's come out. Here, have a look 'Stormy Monday Blues', Little Joe Cook.' I said, 'That's me!' She said, 'It's not on the label,' and I looked at it. Sue Records and I thought, 'Right, I know who did this.' Because I was contracted to Columbia at the time, Blackwell needed another name. They made the name up. I didn't know that.

PB

Did you know that they released this record?

Chris:

Released?

PB

That they put it on the market, or was that without your knowledge.

Chris:

Without my knowledge, when I heard it, you know.

PB

That was a real surprise to you.

Chris:

Yeah, a real surprise. It's worth a lot of money now.

PB

Yeah, I can imagine. I know when you go on ebay for example, some people want 100 US Dollars and more.

Chris:

Yeah

PB

Why was the Jagger/Richards composition 'Out of Time' with Chris Farlowe a Number 1 hit and not the version by the Rolling Stones?

Chris:

Well, the Rolling Stones wrote the song for me. I was the first one to record it, you know.

PB

OK. And so your recording was earlier on the market than on the Rolling Stones' album.

Chris:

Oh yeah, absolutely.

PB

Was the album 'Between the Buttons' or was it 'Aftermath'?

Chris:

It was a year later that they did it. It was my backing track, so they sang over my backing track. But mine was the original. They wrote it for me.

PB

So I thought they were on the market right at the same time, but the Rolling Stones' version came one year later.

Chris:

Yeah, one year later, yeah.

PB

Very much to the advantage of your hit.

Chris:

Yeah

PB

You released 11 singles, 3 EPS and 4 LPs with Immediate.

Chris

Did I?

PB

'Handbags and Gladrags' was released in 1967. It was composed for you by Mike d'Abo, but it was Rod Stewart and the Stereophonics who were successful with it on the hit parade. Was Immediate also not the right partner for your music, for with the exception of 'Out of Time' there was no other Number 1 hit?

Chris:

No, well no. Hard to get a Number 1 hit. Do you know, Elton John – Elton John (!) has only had one No. 1 hit record in England? Only one and that was when Diana died, he did that one. All his records never made Number 1. Isn't that strange?

PB:

And he sold millions, millions.

Chris:

Yeah, interesting! I didn't know that until someone said it on the television the other day. I thought: Only one Number 1! Even Elton John! Bloody Hell!

PB

Yes, absolutely. After Immediate went bankrupt at the end of the sixties, Rick Gunnell tried to capture the American market with you. What were your experiences with the American market and with the American public, in particular?

Chris:

I never went there. I never sang there, not in those days, no. Only recently, when Van Morrison was working there he asked me to come and sing with him, you know.

PB

So you didn't go on tour?

Chris:

No, never. Unfortunately, no. But now, you know, I can walk down the street in New York and they recognise me. They say, 'Hey, you're Chris Farlowe!' I get it all over the world, you know. It's amazing how people know that, you know.

PB

I recently saw a video with you and Albert Lee in Japan.

Chris:

Oh, right? OK, yeah. Yeah Albert asked me to come and play with him at the Cotton Club.

PB

Yeah, right. In Tokio.

Chris:

Yeah. That was an interesting thing. We were staying at the Intercontinental Hotel – a fantastic hotel. You could imagine, you know. I'll give it to the Japanese. They gave you everything you wanted: great money, top hotel. And I was 13 floors up overlooking Tokio Bay. And I'm laying in my bed watching TV and all of a sudden my bed went like 'Boom, boom, boom, boom!' And I thought 'What the Fuck? What is this?' And the chandelier there was going sssss, sssss and I went (= sagte) 'Oh no, no!' And then 'Boom, Boom' and I went, 'Jesus Christ, what do I do?' Anyway, I looked out of the window where the bay was and it was smooth before the earthquake and when I looked, all he waer was jumping up and down like it was fish.

PB

So you were right in the middle of an earthquake?

Chris:

So I got up and I was about 6 floors up. I didn't go in the lift. I went all the way down the stairs to the foyer like this and there was a woman standing there just working on the computer and I walked up to her and I said, 'Excuse me, have we just had an earthquake here?' And on the wall was a television screen and it had 5.2.

PB

On the Richter scale.

Chris:

'Yeah, we've just had a 5.2 tremor and I went, 'Really?' and she said, 'Yeah, it's normal here.' I said, 'Normal?' Yes, she said, 'It happens every week here.' Then she says, 'That's OK. It's OK', she said. 'We're waiting for the big one.' And I said, 'I hope it doesn't happen while I'm here.'

PB

And the big one came a little later.

Chris:

I'm glad I wasn't there. It made me really scared.

PB

I can imagine. The bed is walking and the chandelier as well.

Chris

... dancing! I couldn't believe it!

(Coffee Break)

PB

'From here to Mama Rosa' is one of your favourite albums. The co-operation with Paul Buckmaster, Steve Hammond and Bruce Waddell led to a type of music never heard from you again afterwards. What was so special about 'From here to Mama Rosa'?

Chris:

I love that album, yeah. Well it was an emotional record for me because I'd just broken up with my fiancée, June Whiteman it was and 'Head in the Clouds' was for her. 'Head in the clouds, nose in the air, getting nowhere', you know. It was about her and it was really emotional. But it's a lovely album and I mean songs were written by the guys and I really felt like And Paul Buckman, cello player, he did a lot of work for Elton John, David Bowie, you know. And it's just one of my favourite songs, favourite albums. Even a lot of people say, 'What a great album that is', you know.

PB

Absolutely, I like it too.

Chris:

I love it. 'Head in Mama Rosa'. It's about a drug lady. Bruce and the boys, they like their marijuana and it's about

PB

So that was a real person.

Chris:

Yeah, a real person from Fulham. She was a dealer in drugs, mainly cannabis. (Sings) 'Nowhere to

go if you know, something to do, if you don't. Go along to Mama Rosa'. Yeah, this is what it is, you know.

PB

Eric Burdon tells the story that Paul McCartney offered you the chance to sing the worldwide hit 'Yesterday' but you refused. What was the reason?

Chris:

No, I never refused. I was in a nightclub and Paul came in and he was talking to me and he said, 'I done a great song today. You could do a great job on it.' And I said, 'Oh yeah, what's it called?' 'Yesterday'. I said, 'Oh good, is it good?' He said, 'It's very good, yeah.' And before he left, he said, 'Give me a call at the office tomorrow and we'll discuss it,' you know. And of course, I was a bit drunk and in the morning, I completely forgot about it. And then I saw him on the London Palladium on his own with the guitar doing 'Yesterday'. And I thought, 'That was the song that he wanted me to do!'

PB

And Burdon tells another story. Paul McCartney knocked on the door of your mother's home and your mother said, 'No Chris is not at home.'

Chris:

No, no, no!

PB

And he left a sheet of paper with his name and the title. I've seen the video when Eric is telling the story.

Chris:

No, that's not correct, no.

PB

OK

Chris:

I was in a nightclub in the West End – 'Bag of Nails' it was called. And Paul McCartney and his wife Linda and Julie Felix were here. So we had a drink and Paul invited me to his table and we had a couple of sandwiches and then his wife said, 'Paul, I'm going back to the Dorchester Hotel with Julie. What are you doing?' He said, 'I'm staying here with Chris, having a drink.' OK. So at the end of the night – they were closing up – about 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning – very late and Paul said to me, 'How you getting home?' I said, 'Oh, I'll get a cab.' He said, 'Oh no, I'll get my chauffeur to take you home.' He said, 'Come on, we'll go.' So we walked out and there was this Rolls Royce parked there, you know, and the chauffeur. So we got in and he said, 'Tell the guy where you want to go.' So I said, 'OK' So we got to my house, which was about 6 miles away and I said, 'Do you want to come in for a cup of tea/cup of coffee?' And he said, 'Yeah, come on.' So he said to his driver, 'I'm going to be a bit.' So the driver said, 'OK.' Then we came down to my apartment. I lived in the ground floor. My mother and father lived on the rest of the house. They were in bed, 2 floors above. So I switched the light on and then Paul saw my record collection, you know. And he was looking through my record collection and finds the Johnny Burnette 10 inch coral album: 'Rock 'n Roll Train'. And he said, 'Oh, this is great. I don't even have this.' I said, 'Do you want to hear it?' 'Yeah, put it on.' So I turned it up: 'Keep on rolling all night long, train keep on rolling'. And we're sitting there going, 'Oh, this is fucking great!' And suddenly, the light goes on outside my room and the door opened and my mother walked in. She was in her nightclothes and hair curlers. She says,

'John, John, do you know what time it is?' I said She said, 'You know, you're waking everybody up. Dad's awake.' I said, 'Oh sorry, I didn't mean that and then she looks around and sees Paul McCartney sitting ehre, you know. So she's looking at him, like this.

PB

Did she know him at that time?

Chris:

She knew, yeah. So she turns round, walks out the door, switches the light off. She's gone! Paul said to me, 'It is alright Chris?' he said. I said, 'Turn the record down a little bit and finish your tea.' Anyway, 15 minutes later, the light went back on. My mum walked back in, completely dressed, in a dress, all her hair done, handbag and makeup. 'Hello Paul, nice to met you.' 6 o' clock in the morning this was!

PB

Fantastic!

(Short break for photos)

PB

If you want one, I'll give you that as a present.

Chris:

Yeah, thank you. Do it for me. I'll put it up on my main Belgium wall with my gold records.

PB

She did a great job.

Chris:

Yeah.

PB

And she painted it within one week.

Chris:

Did she? Oh from a photograph?

PB

Yeah, from a photograph. OK next question.

You came to John Hiseman's 'Colosseum' with recommendations from Dave Greenslade. For the production of 'Daughter of Time' you were initially supposed to just take over the singing. After the record was finished, you remained a member of 'Colosseum' for 11 months. What was so special about the band?

Chris:

Well, I'd never heard of the band before, but it was very jazz-influenced and I like my jazz singers. So I had no difficulty in singing whatever they were playing, you know. Not only that, when the guitar player Clem started playing, I started doing it with him, like 'Doodely, do, doodely da'.

PB

Yeah, exactly.

Chris:

And then Jon Hiseman said, 'Fucking hell, he's good, isn't he?' Scat singing.

PB

Scat singing, yeah. But that's what you did already at the beginning.

Chris:

When I was a kid, yeah, when I was a boy. That was 1961 that was.

PB

Exactly.

Chris:

I'd go, 'Doodely, doodely and that when I'd sing the backstops.

PB

Exactly, very few singers

Chris:

Nobody did that. Only the jazz singers did that. No pop singer did it. So that was really good. And 'Colosseum' is fantastic, I mean.

PB

It's a fantastic band.

Chris:

I mean, we'd played with many American bands - 'Chicago', I remember we played with 'Chicago Transit Company' one day. They changed their name to 'Chicago'.

PB

And they changed their musical style.

Chris:

They did. You're right, absolutely. And that was all because they played with us.

PB

Yeah.

Chris:

I remember when we did the first tour of Germany with 'Free' and the first night of the gig, we played the first gig and they all went bananas! And then 'Free' came on and started playing and they (= the audience) started picking up bottles And the next day, we were travelling by train – the 2 bands – always all over Germany by train – and the manager came up to us and said, 'I think we'd better turn it around. You go on last and we go on first. Because we're getting trouble.'

PB

Sure, I can imagine. The fans will be dissatisfied then.

Chris:

Yeah, yeah.

PB

Or frustrated. Hiseman planned to make 'Colosseum' big in America. Why didn't that come off?

Chris:

I don't know. I never went to America with 'Colosseum'. I know John did before me, before I joined the band. He went to America with them, but nothing happened.

PB

Mark Clarke is American, isn't he?

Chris:

No, he's from Liverpool.

PB

Ah, from Liverpool, OK. He lives in America?

Chris:

He lives in New York, yeah. Great bass player. Nice singer too.

PB

From 'Colosseum' you went to 'Atomic Rooster'. I first saw you with 'Colosseum' in Oldenburg in March 1971 and then a year later with 'Atomic Rooster' in Wilhelmshaven, as I told you at dinner. I absolutely loved the music, your performance and crazy Vincent Crane. Why did you later regret going to 'Atomic Rooster'?

Chris:

It wasn't my music. I enjoyed singing some of the stuff, but some of the stuff was weird. Like Vincent, he was playing weird stuff. Great keyboard player though.

PB

But he wrote the songs especially for you.

Chris:

What ones?

PB

The ones on 'Made in England' and 'Nice 'n' Greasy'.

Chris:

Yeah, one of the best songs I've ever sung is one of his songs. That's 'Can't find a reason to live without you.' Lovely song. Black Snake's good too.

PB

Um, absolutely.

Chris:

The band were a little bit ... sort of ... they were very young compared to me, but I had about 9 months of it I suppose, or a year. Then I really thought Then I met Bruce, who I knew. Bruce was in the Thunderbirds and then Stuart Mackay, the producer and then Paul Buckmaster and then we started reording 'The Hill' Album, you know. And that was the end of 'Atomic Rooster'.

PB

As we said earlier on, a guy like Ric Parnell and Vincent Crane – that was probably too much.

Chris:

Well, Vincent Crane, he was a lovely man, very nice, but very screwed up. He was into black magic and all this sort of stuff, you know. And we went to have dinner with him one night, and a friend of mine, at his house.

PB

He had manic depression.

Chris:

Yeah, very, very. And I saw him about a year before he died. I hadn't seen him for years. I was walking down the flea market (Flohmarkt) and he was standing here.

PB

Camden Market, where you had the stall?

Chris:

The stall, yeah. And all his clothes were on the pavement. And I said to him, 'What are you doing here?' He said, 'I'm selling my clothes.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'I'm broke, Chris. I have nothing, you know'. I felt so fucking bad about it.

PB

Absolutely.

Chris:

I said, 'Vincent, what can I say?' He said, 'My wife has left me.' and I thought, 'Oh dear', you know.

PB

What was the name of his widow?

Chris:

Valerie, was it? Val? Don't know.

PB

She still runs a website.

Chris:

Yeah, she does, yeah. Valerie? Can't remember now.

PB

After 'Atomic Rooster' you had a bad car accident and began selling Nazi and militaria memorabilia. Did this material comply with your political convictions, or was it just a (profitable) business?

Chris:

No, it's nothing political, you know. Selling German stuff was really strange for my father, you know. I remember I had a big oil painting of Heinrich Himmler in my bedroom!

PB

The right hand of Adolf Hitler!

Chris:

Yeah the leader of the SS, you know, standing there. And my father walked in my bedroom one day and went, 'Take that off the wall. Take it off the wall!' I said, 'I'm selling it dad. It's not political. 'Take the fucking thing off the wall!' So, I took it off the wall. He didn't like that. I have crosses and all that he didn't mind, because he found them on German dead bodies anyway, and took 'em. Yeah, but when he saw Himmler standing there, like head of the SS you know, no he didn't like that at all. I've got a photograph of me looking at that painting. I have. Yeah, I'll dig it out and show it to you.

PB

I have some of these photographs at home.

Chris:

Yeah.

PB

So, I'll probably make it part of the biography, yeah, when it comes out. Who looked after the shop ('Call to Arms') when you were on tour?

Chris:

I had a manager called Pete Seymour and Tony Bradley and they were the ones that worked that for me. Tony Bradley I still see. I don't know what ever happened to Pete Seymour.

PB

What happened to the shop in the meantime?

Chris:

I closed it down – oh in the early seventies – and I moved into like modernism furniture from that period, you know. I like that. I like any art, design, because I studied that at college when I went to carpentry after school. Frank Lloyd Wright and his buildings. Fantastic, you know. So I was influenced by these people, you know.

PB

OK

PB

The best band project (in my opinion) came in August 1975, the 'Chris Farlowe Band'. The fantastic live album was recorded in the Marquee Club and the Lyceum. In January 1976 there was a recording of a performance of the band at the BBC. The album contains fantastic tracks such as 'Peace of Mind', 'Only Women bleed', 'Mandy' and 'You haven't done nothing'. Why of all tracks was the Beatles' song 'We can work it out' released as a single?

Chris:

I mean I'm not a great fan of the Beatles, I never have been, but I understand and realise that they are great songwriters. And one of my favourite songs by the Beatles was, 'We can work it out'. (Sings first line: 'Got to see it my way, do I have to keep on talking till I can't go on'). And I thought, 'What a lovely song.' And one day, I was in the recording studio and I thought (sings first line his way). I'm going to do it like that, totally different to what the Beatles thought. And Paul McCartney still says to this day says it's the best version he's ever heard. So I did that, it's my arrangement.

PB

Yeah, but this also didn't work out as a real hit.

Chris:
No, no.

PB
Unfortunately

Chris:
Unfortunately, it's very very hard to

PB
'Mandy' for example. That's a Barry Manilow song. This record is fantastic.

Chris:
You know, some people say to me – oh not say to me – in those days, they said to me, 'Why did you pick 'Mandy'? You shouldn't have sung 'Mandy'. I said, 'Yeah, I should have sung 'Mandy'. First off, it's a fantastic song and the way I sing it, is completely different to Barry Manilow.

PB
Absolutely.

Chris:
And it's a lovely song.

PB
Fantastic!

Chris:
And when you've got a voice like mine (sings 'I remember all my life') ... And we played it everywhere and the crowd loved it. To this day, on the English tour I sing 'Mandy' and it goes down I get a standing ovation!

PB
Fantastic. Can you sing it tomorrow?

Chris:
No, not tomorrow. We haven't rehearsed that.

PB
Another question concerning the 'Chris Farlowe Band'. In the Marquee-Club the 'Chris Farlowe Band' broke the record with an audience of 1200 people. Only a fraction of this number turned up at the following tour of 9 concerts in various English towns. Why was the music successful in London and not in the countryside?

Chris:
Yeah, it's a bit weird that. London is a completely different place to the rest of England, you know. It all happens in London, you know. But when you've got Leicester or Nottingham – although I did have fans in Nottingham – they think, you know. But London is where it all happens, you know. That's why.

PB
The taste of these people is also different.

Chris:

Yeah, when the Beatles became famous, they didn't live in Liverpool.

PB

No, exactly.

Chris:

They lived in London. You have to live in London if you want to do a TV show and a radio show the same day and the BBC. It's all in London.

PB

Same thing with Berlin now. If you want to make it, if you want to be successful, you've got to go to Berlin.

Chris:

Right. Cool, yeah.

PB

I can understand.

'Curriculee Curricula' was a musical composed by Dave Greenslade in which you performed with Sonja Christina (from Curved Air). The ballad 'Feel The Power Of Love' was recorded also as a duet with Lorna B for the 'Eurovision Song Contest' in the year 2000. Both activities do not rank as the most successful Chris Farlowe projects. How did these duets come about?

Chris:

My manager really. He got the information that they wanted to do a song with me for the 'Eurovision Song Contest'. Well I'm not a fan of the 'Eurovision Song Contest' because some of the records are terrible, even the English-made. But I thought the one we did with that girl was good. It was a good song, but we live in a funny world, you know. As Tom Petty said, 'Rock 'n' Roll is not for everybody.'

PB

That's it, absolutely.

Chris:

In 1983, you recorded a few demos with John Gunnell as the producer and 'Gonzalez'. That was a soul backup band.

Chris:

Good band, yeah. They were a good band.

PB

Where can these recordings be heard and who were the band members of 'Gonzalez'?

Chris:

I don't know. I haven't got a clue if it was ever recorded. Mick Eve was the saxophone player, who's still around. The guitar player was - oh, Roger Chapman's guitarist, Steve Simpson. But it was a great soul, funk band and I liked working with them. 'Gonzalez' sounds like Santano, sort of funk ...

PB

Rhythm section, yeah.

Chris:
Bit more like 'Tower of Power', or something like that.

PB
Yeah, yeah, yeah. But I never heard of them before I read one of these articles.

Chris:
I'll ask Mick Eve if there's anything available, cos he's playing with 'Boney M'. at the moment.

PB
Yeah. 'Boney M.'? So they're also still around.

Chris:
They've got a new guy singer cos the guy's s dead, isn't he?

PB
They woke up again, yeah.

Chris:
But they've woke up again, yeah.

PB
You worked with Jimmy Page on at least 3 projects that I'm aware of: 'Outrider', 'Death Wish' and 'The Beginning'. What significance does Jimmy Page as a person have for you?

Chris:
Oh, a lot. At the age of 15 years old he used to follow us around like Van Morrison did at these different gigs in London. We'd always see this young guy sitting there and I'd say, 'Alright?' 'Yeah, I'm listening to you. Great band, great singer.' And I said, 'Who are you?' He said, 'I'm Jimmy.' 'James Page.' He called himself 'James' then. 'I'm James Page and I'm a guitarist.' I said, 'Oh, good'. And then we got to the sessions a couple of years later and there he was there playing, you know 'Out of Time' and Moanin' – he did the first guitar on Moanin'. And we became friends and he always liked me as a singer, like Van does. They were doing this 'Death Wish' album, with the film.

PB
It was Charles Bronson.

Chris:
Yeah, And they rang me up and said, 'Can you do the singing on this 'Death Wish' film?' I said, 'Yes, sure, let's do it, yeah.

PB
Great songs!

Chris:
So, over the years, we've built up this reputation. I was the first choice singer – believe it or not – for Led Zeppelin.

PB
Go on!

Chris:

Yeah, first choice singer. But when Jimmy realised that I'd already had a successful career, he said no. But I was a mod. I was a mod! You know mods: long blond hair, bad chest chains. They picked Robert Plant and I said, 'Robert Plant is the perfect singer for Led Zeppelin, not Chris Farlowe.' I'm very smart, with my suits and my hair's all nice. But them, they're all like rough like

PB
Rockers!

Chris:
Like the 'Foo Fighters' are now – like that you know. And they're rockers, you know. They've got tight jeans and all this. Not me! I wouldn't do none of that. So Jimmy says, 'No, I think you're right.'

PB
I cannot imagine you to be a member of Led Zeppelin.

Chris:
No. And yet when we did this record thing at the beginning, I said to Jimmy, 'If you ever want to start up Led Zeppelin again Jimmy, I'm available to be the vocalist if you want.' And he just laughed and said, 'I don't even play the guitar any more Chris,' he said. 'I'd have to learn all my phrases again,' you know. So I said, 'It's a joke! Don't worry about it.'

PB
But I recently heard that there are plans to reunite Led Zeppelin.

Chris:
No, no.

PB
That's gossip, eh?

Chris:
Robert Plant is out now with his own band. He's got a new album come out – brand new – called 'Fire'. 'Fire', or something. He was on television last night in London doing a number from it, yeah.

PB
So I have to follow that on.

Chris:
Yeah. No, there's definitely no Jim's not interested, nor is Robert.

PB
OK. 'Prison Blues' and the 'Blues Anthem' were both composed by you. Why aren't there more Chris Farlowe compositions? Wouldn't writing music suited to you have been a way towards more commercial success?

Chris:
Yes, it would have done, yes, but I find writing songs hard. Some people - like the Beatles - they can write hit after hit every day, but me – I don't know how to write a song really. Yet for Led Zeppelin - Jimmy Page's 'Outrider' Album - when I got to the studio, I said, 'What we doing Jim?' He said, 'We don't have anything.' I said, 'What do you mean we don't have anything? What about your songs?' He said, 'I don't have anything. We have to make it up as we go along.' So I went to my bedroom in his house. I took some paper and a pen and by the next morning, I'd come up with our

Blues Anthem.

PB

That's a great song.

Chris:

Yeah, it's great. Great lyrics and I wrote that in one evening and I was very surprised, yeah, very surprised.

PB

That's very unusual

Chris:

Yeah, very unusual for me. I could take months and months and months writing a song and yet for that Jimmy Page album

PB

You always want to make it better.

Chris:

Yeah. Something wrong. I always think, well that's wrong. I'm not gonna do that and now I'll leave it. And then a month later, I'll be, 'Oh yeah – let me – that song. I've got something on.' and that's the way it goes with me. But other people like Elton John, they can write songs. Van Morrison: I said how many songs have you written Van, that you've recorded? He said, 'Oh over 500.' 500! 500! And you never see him doing any writing. When he's on tour with you, you know during the day, he's sitting around reading and you'd never see him writing a song. I said, 'Where'd you get the time to do your songs.'

PB

In the night.

Chris:

He's doing 'em. It always baffles me how songwriters of that ilk (= seinesgleichen) can do it.

PB

500 songs. That's a lot.

Chris:

500 songs and most of 'em have been big hits for him.

PB

Exactly and not running the danger to repeat the one or other idea.

Chris:

Yeah, like U2. They always pick

Their new record, I heard it today.

PB

The Joshua Tree one.

Chris:

Bono – him. It's always the same.

PB

Yeah, yeah. Exactly and that's the problem. They have no new stuff to

Chris:

New ideas.

PB

New ideas, right.

Where did you first meet Norman Beaker? How did your cooperation come about and what significance has the Norman Beaker Band for your live performance?

Chris:

Well, I was playing up in Manchester at the Buxton Opera House and Norman was playing with Robert Plant, funnily enough. Every year they held a reunion concert for Alexis Korner's death and then one day he says to me, 'Chris, would you like to come and sing some songs with us about Alexis?' I said, 'Yeah, I'll do that.' So next time I went up there we did it and all of a sudden he said, 'We should do some work together,' and that was it. That was 15 years ago and we're still working together.

PB

He's a fantastic guitarist.

Chris:

Lovely guitar player, yeah and a lovely guy. The whole band is fantastic. None of 'em smoke, which is very good, which is very rare. A whole band that doesn't smoke! But they do drink. They love their beer. They're from Manchester, you know. They like real ale.

PB

Now that you mentioned the name Alexis Korner, that brings me to another question. On 19 April, 1978, Alexis Korner celebrated his 50th birthday in a live concert in the Gatsby Room at the Pinewood Studios in London. Korner invited you and Eric Clapton to the concert, which was especially organised for the WDR Rockpalast and recorded and filmed in cooperation with the BBC. Do you have any idea why the concert was never shown as a film or video or released on DVD?

Chris:

I didn't know that.

PB

Not available.

Chris:

No, I didn't know. It was recorded was it?

PB

I remember I saw it live on that particular day on German TV.

Chris:

And it's never been released.

PB

No, only the music on a vinyl and in the meantime also on a CD.

Chris:

I never knew that. I'll ask Norman.

PB

You see one 1 or 2 sequences of the concert on you tube and that's all. The concert as a whole has never been on a DVD or on a video.

Chris:

That is strange. There's a lot of people I sign the albums all the time on the Korner album. Is it gatefolded?

PB

It's a gatefold with Alexis Korner on the front cover. Birthday Album, that's the title, yeah. Lonnie Donegan was your first idol and you used to play his music on an acoustic guitar. Is that true?

Chris:

Not Lonnie Donegan. No, I didn't really like Lonnie Donegan. A lot of people have asked me that. 'Do you like Donegan?' I said no.

PB

The question is where of from whom did you learn to play the guitar and do you still play?

Chris:

I strummed the guitar. I don't think I played it. That's different you know. It was a schoolboy thing. My mum went out and bought a guitar for me, came back and I started strumming it. And then I got photographs of me at my mum's birthday party – me a little boy, I'm singing. My mum said, 'Go on, get your guitar and sing.' I'm sure it wasn't right. The cords were wrong, I'm sure.

PB

OK. Another important person was Otis Redding, who saw you performing at the Flamingo and invited you to Ready, Steady, Go. Were there any further performances or joint cooperations after this?

Chris:

Yeah, we did the Ready, Steady, Go Show and at the end, I said to him, 'That was great! Thank you for inviting me.' He went, 'Oh thank you Chris. Fantastic tonight! You were great!' And then the next day, we were playing in the Boston Gliderdrome near Peterborough and we were driving up the A1 in our van and there was a big sign on the road and it said, 'Tonight at the Boston Gliderdrome – Otis Redding and his band, plus Chris Farlowe and the Thunderbirds!' I said, 'Shit, we're on with Otis tonight!' And we got to the gig and I walked into his dressing room and he said, 'What are you doing here?' I said, 'We're on with you tonight playing.' Oh good,' he said, 'You can come up on stage at the end and sing some songs with me like, Shake, etc.' And that's how we did it. And someone the other day – and I'll show it on my iPad tomorrow – someone sent me – he's got the original poster. He's got 'Boston Gliderdrome Tonight' and it's got Otis Redding like that and underneath it's got 'Supported by Chris Farlowe.' And I said to the guy, 'Do you want to sell that poster?' and he said, 'No.'

PB

And he may still have it.

Chris:

He's still got it. I signed it for him. He brought it to one of the concerts and I took it out and went, 'I'll give you 100 Pounds for it' and he said, 'No.' I said, '150 Pounds.' He said, 'No.' '200 Pounds.' He said, 'No.' I said, 'You ain't gonna sell it, are you?'

PB

For a real fan it has more value than that.

Chris:

That was a great ... I'll show it to you on my ipad tomorrow.

PB

OK.

You have sung a lot of Mick Jagger's songs. How did your friendship with him come about?

Chris:

Well, I knew Mick Jagger before he was in the Rolling Stones. He used to come to the Ricky Tick Club – you've got that poster. And he used to sit there like Van Morrison and Jimmy Page, just sit there and listen to the band, you know. Then he'd come up and say, 'My name's Mick. This is Keith. We love your band.' I said, 'Oh, good. You got a band?' 'Well we're gonna try and form a band called the Rolling Stones.' 'Oh good. I hope it's successful.'

PB

They always turned up as friends – Mick and Keith.

Chris:

Yeah, yeah. There was a lot of people like that, you know. That's how we became friends. Like Peter Gabriel. He was sitting and watching us, you know. 'And you influenced me.'

PB

And you never knew this before.

Chris:

And I said, 'Peter Gabriel! I influenced you?' And he said, 'Yes, you did.' I was in Vienna with Colosseum, the last year of their tour. We were on with Jethro Tull and I caught the lift down in the hotel. And the doors opened and Ian Anderson was standing there with his flute and he looked at me and he went, 'Oh!' I went, 'Oh, hello. How are you?' And he said, 'Chris Farlowe.' 'Oh,' he said, 'I'm honoured to meet you.' 'Oh,' he said, 'I'll tell you a story about you and me.' I said, 'Alright.' Got down in the lift, had a cup of coffee. He said, 'When I was 15 years old. my mother and father had a newspaper shop in Blackpool and I used to be the newspaper boy that delivered the newspapers on my bicycle. And one day I looked in the newspaper and it said: 'Tonight the Winter Gardens, Chris Farlowe and the Thunderbirds.' And I said to my dad, 'Dad, can I go and watch this band tonight, cos I want to watch 'em,' you know. And he said, 'Yeah, but make sure you're back by 11o' clock. 'I'll be back,' you know. Anyway, he said, 'I saw you that night with Albert Lee and I knew then that I wanted to become a Rock 'n' Roll musician and you started it all off for me.'

PB

Come on!

Chris:

And I said, Jethro Tull! Jethro Tull!

PB

That's unbelievable, isn't it?

Chris:

Yes, You never know who you'll influence. You think you go down the club and sing and that's it. You don't realise what young

PB

How many people you touch, or whose hearts you touch.

Chris:

Yeah, that's right and how many famous people that are going to be famous are sitting there who aren't famous you know. But they say, 'I like your band. Fantastic! Great band', you know.

PB

When I heard you with Norman Beaker in Bonn in the cellar in the jazz club for the first time in years and years, I almost had tears in my eyes.

Chris:

Really? It was that bad, was it?

PB

It was that good. It was fantastic!

PB

So last question: Which guests are you expecting for your birthday party?

Chris:

Right, tomorrow I've got Paul McCartney coming, Elton John, all the Rolling Stones are coming, Led Zeppelin is coming, The Foo Fighters, The Who. It's going to be a good night.

PB

Good, fantastic. Thank God that I bought a ticket.

Chris:

Probably Klaus Doldinger, or the other guy, the one who lives in the Atlantic Hotel.

PB

Udo Lindenberg.

Chris:

Yeah, he might be there, yeah. You never know.

OB

Let's see.

Chris:

You never know. Tomorrow night might be a big night tomorrow.

PB

I hope so. I'm pretty sure it will become a big night. Thank you for your answers.

Chris:

Pleasure! Any time, you know that.

PB

Thank you very much.

Chris:

We'll continue it another time.

PB

When I have more (end of tape).