



2 MY OLD FRIEND

*they told me my old friend
told me you were dead
they brought me bad news to hear
and bitter tears to shed
I wept as I remembered together you and I
how we tired the sun with our laughter
and chased him from the sky*

True to form and not to my surprise, Arthur's success hadn't lasted long. The stupid bugger soon went and got himself killed. But, unlike so many before and since, he couldn't just die in lonely squalor as any other decently wasted legend, but had to end his days like some Beano character mashed up in a giant food processor. If I recalled it right, and the story was bizarre enough to be emblazoned on my memory even if I hadn't known the victim personally, his Jag was found early one morning halfway through the brick wall of a meat pie factory in Leicestershire.

Arthur, so the police eventually deduced, must have stumbled from the wreckage into the building (his vehicle was found littered with empty whisky bottles) and fallen into a big vat feeding the chopping and mincing machines. His bloodied cap, all that remained of him, was discovered nearby. As soon as two and two were put together production was halted, but by then several hundred of the renowned pastries had rolled off the assembly line. Each one was painstakingly sifted for human remains but such is the efficiency of the modern processed food industry that nothing bar a few soiled cloth fibres could be identified. Nothing that is, except a single tooth which had miraculously evaded the machinery and been discovered under a delicious looking pastry crust, all neatly wrapped and ready for dispatch.

Death, as so often happens in the entertainment business ⁽¹⁾, may have ruined his complexion but enhanced his kudos and especially his bank balance. Immediately following the monster mash all manner of celebrities were heard regaling his praises and admitting, for the first time in public, how much they owed their 'old mate' Arthur Grimsby. 'What a colourful character, eh?' Within no time at all a special compilation album was put out, tribute concerts arranged, press articles written, etc, all celebrating the man's unassuming genius. Even today, though most music buffs have either forgotten or never heard of him, a small band of aficionados still argue the toss about his influence in obscure corners – a tricky task since evidence, as with the pie butchery, is thin on the ground.

Was it 82 or 83 when he ran down the curtain to join the bleedin' choir invisible? ⁽²⁾ Somewhere around then anyway. Processed and packaged like any other product – a parody of the music industry itself. Mind you, Arthur always did love his pork pies, provided they were nice 'n' hot and spicy, and would have appreciated the irony. His only regret, perhaps, not to be ending his days in the genuine Melton Mowbray article but a mass produced facsimile – such are the indignities of celebrity death.

I recalled how he'd first sneaked his way into my life, back in those innocent days when Dan Dare and William Brown were my heroes (as a matter of fact they still are) his banter had amused, irritated and intrigued me. Then, as an affable show off, a cocky young upstart who seemed to know everyone, yet whose own origins and personal life were a mystery, I'd felt both repelled and drawn towards him in equal measure. He was an enigma; an annoyingly gifted musician who couldn't be arsed to step on stage (unless heavily sedated or disguised) but who jammed offstage with startling virtuosity, carelessly executing riffs that many top flight players struggled with. Unlike most of the wannabes I knew as a teenager,

including myself, he seemed totally unpretentious and without ambition. Indeed, he revelled in being so.

Though he often regaled us with hilarious insider dealings involving the rich and famous, he was never one of them himself – always a bum at heart – or so it seemed. And a bum who genuinely had no respect for position or power, as happy rolling Rizzlas on the Embankment as snorting top quality gear in the back of Lord Iffingham's Roller. He was, in short, his own peculiar man. Not fashionably bohemian, just naturally unkempt; his long golden hair and sparse Cavalier whiskers looking forever sun bleached; sporting a single large golden earring (the first man I ever saw wearing one in real life but which, I later discovered, was actually a brass curtain ring inserted into a self-inflicted piercing) and, wherever he went and whoever he was with, always wore a bemused expression of child-like amusement at the world. Well, almost always – when not stoned, drunk or pissed off with his latest 'old lady' anyway.

You may find it hard to believe that anyone could be upset about finding themselves in the spotlight, suddenly showered with untold goodies and adoring attention, especially after years of hand-to-mouth subsistence, but Arthur was. Yet he was no fool – or so I always assumed - seeming to have sussed perhaps the most important of life's secrets, and at a very young age; that is, to be happy you must be free. As Kris Kristofferson once sang, 'Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose.' In Arthur's case he'd already lost it - having spent time at Her Majesties pleasure, and with plenty of time to contemplate such existential mysteries. Of course, his air of devil-may-care nonchalance was infectious and though, like some passing Messiah, I'd never have wanted to step in his shoes, felt his charisma and was inspired. Drawn like all young things by hints of dangerous delights and carefree nights infused with rebellion.

And then he was gone; his words of wisdom, for me least, taking on a more profound relevance. Not that I did much about it at the time. My own life was still a rambling mess, but I did wonder sometimes how things might have turned out if I'd ignored the damned idiot? And how come I was so easily seduced? Maybe this is the kind of rationalisation a drunk makes in rehab – trying to justify youthful gullibility. But I guess it was his stories that were the clincher. Like any good joke or urban myth, they had a simple timelessness which not only left you smiling but also wondering - could this bullshit actually be true? Some of them I later paraphrased (stole), put a tune to and called 'my songs' - you may discover a few between these pages - evidence of the singer-songwriter's art so to speak.

Of course I've nicked ideas from many other sources too, but it started with Arthur - not just the song pilfering but something about his laid back style, the twinkle in his piggy blue eyes as he laid down yet another improbable riff. Also, and maybe primarily I have to confess, his wayward life style. It seemed so impossibly intrepid, yet readily available to any young chancer with their head in the clouds and fidgety feet willing to follow in the Pied Piper's wake. Like many artists and writers I'd read about, I knew you had to break away from familiar ties to discover yourself before you could become truly creative. Maybe I wasn't cut out for that, nor had the talent, but there was only one way to find out - and anyway, I could have a laugh or two along the way.

So Arthur travelled the world, as far as South East Asia and the Americas according to rumour, casually striding out in worn Cuban heel boots (lack of stature his only vanity), wearing the same grey military overcoat and tweed flat cap in all weathers, and following no one but his own idiosyncratic voice. There was nothing set about him, not family, friends or home – even his name changed to suit the occasion. Like an amiable apparition, or dishevelled super hero, Uncle Arthur, as many dubbed him in later years, would appear unannounced; usually when help was needed, though often it seemed as the Lord of Misrule to spread chaos. He never asked for a reward and flatly refused to sign any contract or

negotiate a deal, working entirely off the top of his head and seldom recording anything down for posterity.

What stood him apart from all the other artful dodgers and general blag-artists infesting the music industry? Well, according to him anyway, it was the unique way he had with tunes and lyrics; that, and the stash he hid inside his greatcoat. Sometimes the sole difference between a good song and a fantastic song is not what's there, but what's indefinably missing - a slight inflection here, a bit of reverb or even silence there. And of course, that special lick or magic hook which can provide a rocket powered boost to even the lamest creation. Then again, success may be due to no more than good timing, which can of course imply a multitude of things, but is the most difficult thing to get right or predict. But who can give you the best advice on these matters? Who can be trusted? Not company men, that's for sure – their eyes focused only on past formulas and, as always, profits. Of course, he was not generally welcomed by these people, or even record producers, the Phil Sectors, Tony Viscontis or Brian Enos of the day, but once they realised he wasn't after their money he was generally tolerated – winning out with grinning pixie charm (and the stash).

Every generation has its outstanding session musicians – in the Sixties and Seventies they included names such as Big Jim Sullivan ⁽³⁾, Albert Lee ⁽⁴⁾, Micky Waller ⁽⁵⁾ and, of course, Jimmy Page ⁽⁶⁾ without whom many records would never have made it. Indeed, a good few careers have been built by such wizards (plus various electronic crutches) providing the essential backroom components – the artists themselves having little more than photogenic appeal. But Arthur's talents extended beyond the purely technical; though for him, it was all an accidental game, not a career.

Another thing about the 'legendary' (as he came to be known) Arthur Grimsby was that he only operated strictly under-the-counter. Everyone knew, or soon came to discover, he really had no hidden agenda – at least not one that would ever lead to litigation which, in the wonderful world of music, is virtually unheard of. The man really did just want to be free, left alone to roam. Not to be bothered with any constraints however lucrative the rewards on offer. But what did he ask for in return for his labours? Zilch! Truly, he wanted nothing but the odd anonymous bung – just a little gratitude for aiding and abetting some poor (or wealthy, he didn't care) struggling muso. At least, this was the impression he gave us, though I must admit his stories were sometimes hard to take even for my gullible young ears. The trouble was, with Arthur Grimsby, you were never quite sure.



For example, I recall a hot summer evening on Eel Pie Island back around 1963. The old hotel, relic of a more elegant age, stranded in the centre of the Thames at Twickenham, had the seedy aura of a New Orleans bordello. As a venue for jazz and blues bands, along with the hairy renegades who flocked to hang with them, it had the perfect atmosphere of smoky decadence. Incidentally, I heard later that the owner took it upon himself, some sort of mission if you like, to council lost or wayward youth there – but maybe this was just a ruse to divert pressure from local residents trying to get the place closed down (which it was, in 1967 – but soon after got destroyed in a mysterious fire).

Anyway, during a beer break one summer's night the crowd spilled out onto the river bank relaxing amiably in the fading sunset. Absently looking around I realised some

members of the band were sat on the grass nearby - unlike most be-suited rock groups of the day these were casually dressed and indistinguishable from the rest of us scruffs. I'd seen the Stones before, playing at a pub opposite Richmond Station (so over-crowded that fans were literally dancing in the street) and later at the Crawdaddy club just down the road – but never been in such close proximity. Not that this was such a big deal as most of their gigs were held in cosy surroundings with speakers and drums pounding just a few feet away from punters.

I was sitting with Graham, student and part-time salesman from the Soleway shoe shop where I passed the time of day then – just until I had enough cash to go travelling. Arthur, pint glass in one hand and a spindly roll-up in the other, was sprawled opposite us saying little. Despite genuine enthusiasm about being there amongst so many fellow rhythm and blues enthusiasts our main interest, as per usual, was scanning for talent. However, unlike more mainstream pop concerts, these early Stones gigs were more frequented by long haired lads than leggy girls and, also in contrast, it was the boys mostly shaking about (there was little space to dance as such – we were just reacting to the buzz – much like at punk gigs years later). Some guys, especially at the Crawdaddy held in the low-ceilinged Richmond Athletic Club venue, literally climbed up the walls and hung like demented bats from the roof beams. Keith Richards, in 'Life', says the band called it 'wongin' the pod'. He recalls, 'Wongin' the pog was when we'd look at all these people dancing around, hanging from the rafters, going crazy. "What are they doing?" "They're wongin' the pod ain't they?" It meant you got paid.'⁽⁷⁾

'Artie!'

A voice behind us called out and Arthur acknowledged it with a weak smile. I knew he disliked abbreviations of his name but just scowled briefly and beckoned to the speaker. Brian came over and sat between us, nodding briefly before addressing Arthur again.

'What d'yer think then?'

'Great, but...' he stopped to roll another cigarette. 'You know what I say about covers.'

'For geriatrics? I know but look man...' he gestured around the packed grounds as if to say, 'How can you argue with this?'

'Okay, okay. You're doing well but... what does Keith think?'

'Ahh! You know, he's so into Chicago blues. Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Bo Diddley and all that. That's all he cares about. He's got those Chuck Berry licks down to a tee.'

'Yeah. They're great but... you have to move on - someday anyway. And preferably before you get found out. Chuck'll be outa jail soon and big over here – in his own right. You dig?'

'Maybe,' said Brian, doubtfully.

'What about Mick?'

'You know, we watch his tight little tail bobbing around out there like some girl and it keeps us amused. But then, someone's got to I suppose.'

Jones just smiled, not condescendingly but as if he wasn't going to admit anything was wrong. How could it be? They were on the crest of a wave, albeit a somewhat parochial one, but they knew the sharks had the scent and were circling.

Most punters had little idea where the Stones and other R&B bands got their material, even though Lonnie Donegan and others from the recently departed skiffle era had borrowed heavily from the likes of Big Bill Broonzy, Blind Blake, Leadbelly and so on. Even I, plonking away in bedsits with friends, had a repertoire including old blues standards lifted off imported records, but the original artists remained largely exotic unknowns.

'Tell you what,' laughed Arthur. 'And don't take this the wrong way. Without Chess Records⁽⁸⁾ you lot'd be nowhere.'

Though Brian obviously didn't want to hear it he just sniffed. Then, with a grin, said 'Sure – but who cares?'

British pop at the time was virtually a straight steal of the American scene, and no one really argued with that – the Yanks ruled virtually the whole entertainment industry world-wide, so why not music too? Mick, Brian and Keith, along with Cyril Davis, Alexis Korner, Long John Baldry, Graham Bond, John Mayall, Spencer Davis, Georgie Fame, Eric Clapton and others, were just following a well worn path - a little ahead of the game maybe in that their influences were less apparent to the uninitiated, but there was little real difference.

Except, well... except, as a live band, the Stones then did have something a little bit extra - a fortuitous chemistry, stumbled upon by accident or fate - that sent a shiver down your spine. It came upon you slowly, several hundred yards away crossing the narrow footbridge as the sounds of 'Little Red Rooster' or 'Route Sixty-Six' with their ominous bass lines, creepy slide guitar and wailing harmonica reverberated over the dark river waters. Ask anyone who was there, or at other early gigs in steamy packed clubs where, despite the PA system having little more power than a modern home stereo and the guys themselves never strutting around but simply hunched on bar stools staring intently at their fret boards or one another, like malevolent gnomes weaving a spell, creating a pulsating atmosphere that got everyone jumping - everyone except the band themselves. Even Mick, in those early days, stood immobile most of the time, staring out at the heaving masses, bemused, an occasional grimace or turkey-nod the only foretaste of gyrations yet to come.

Of course, it wasn't just the band, emerging with other similar outfits into what would become a huge alternative Sixties underground scene, but the timing. The fact that little or no rock was played on the nations airwaves, teenage culture still very much a mysterious threatening force (hair an inch over the collar was a sackable offence, as I discovered) and even the music business run from the top down with stars manufactured like dolls with little or no say over what they looked or sounded like (Simon Cowell eat your heart out). Even the Beatles, when they first launched, were packaged in neat identical suits and ties to match all the other bands of the era. The Stones by contrast, even though they weren't yet penning their own material, seemed to have an agenda which by-passed the powers that be. In some ways, looking back now, I believe they hardly knew themselves what they'd stumbled on, but whatever it was Arthur seemed to have divined their secret. He also knew, however, that it could all slip down the pan if action were not taken soon.

'Here...' said Arthur, reaching deeply into his capacious army surplus coat whilst peering about surreptitiously.

'Hold on mate,' grinned Brian, assuming perhaps an illicit package was being sought. He then eased himself up and the two sloped off down the path, disappearing behind some aged clapboard bungalows.

'What was all that about?' asked Graham, as mystified as me.

'God knows,' I said. 'But I doubt if it's what you might think.'

'Oh yeah? He grinned.

'Yeah, that's where Arthur carries his harps. He's got 'em in every key – plus spares. Sometimes I reckon it's the only reason he wears that filthy great garment – to stash away his collection. He's brilliant – could teach Jagger a thing or two.'

Graham, who had a better view of the man himself squatting just a few feet behind me, nodded a warning and I shut up. But my friend, who only knew Arthur by reputation having just been introduced tonight, wasn't sure how to react. In some ways he regarded an over attachment to the little metallic blowy things, contaminated with stale bodily fluids as they probably were and secreted surreptitiously away, as little better than the drugs he first took them for. I mean, how does a grown man get to be good at playing such an inconsequential instrument? Presumably only after hours of blowing and sucking in private – not a very

appealing thought for a young man who, despite his liking for blues combos, was really a clean cut kid at heart.

So, when Jones and Grimsby returned a few minutes later grinning amiably at each other, Graham could barely restrain his obvious disapproval.

‘See ya – Nanker,’ said the guitarist, and went off towards the dance hall laughing to himself.

‘Nanker? Who the hell’s Nanker?’ I asked. ⁽⁹⁾

‘You’ll see,’ said Arthur, mysteriously. ‘Just lending a hand, that’s all.’

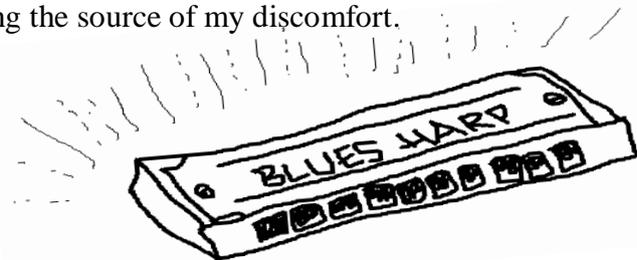
The Stones released their first record a few weeks later, ‘Come On’, a Chuck Berry tune which got to number twenty-one in the charts. Other covers followed, some with B sides penned by Nanker Phelge. Indeed, as Arthur had predicted, it was only when the band began developing their own material did they really take off. How much this was down to Arthur’s influence is hard to say as he never split on accomplices, as he often called them, but I personally doubt if they’d have lasted long without him.

The Stones then manager, Andrew Loog Oldham, is often credited with having locked Mick and Keith in a room until they came up with some original material – the first being ‘As Tears Go By’, which was given to Marianne Faithful and became a hit in 1964. He may well have done that, Oldham was a precocious and ambitious hustler, but he was no musician. Arthur, discretely, had much more effect on their creative output – or so he alleges.

What you have to remember is the Stones were always vainly protective of their image and never wanted to be seen associating with anyone who might be deemed uncool. For example, a key early member was pianist Ian Stewart, a quiet rather nerdy looking guy, but he was edged out and never appeared in publicity shots despite playing with them on stage and in the studio ⁽¹⁰⁾. Arthur too, I’m sure, contributed much more than his wailing harp to the mix – but, as I said, he never was a joiner, not of anything or with anyone.

So what motivated our man then? Was he some kind of saint driven by Geldofian generosity of spirit? A prophet with an insane desire to give succour and support to poor insecure artists hemmed in by the demands of wicked record label bosses, agents and needy girlfriends? Not in the least – he was as selfish, if not more so, than the rest of us. He was also lazy, feckless, self-deluded and only too human when it came to intoxicants.

As for me, as you may discover, I had a love-hate relationship with him for many years; but one which was practically forgotten about till this once happy day in Newcastle. Indeed, for over thirty years I’d turned my back on the music scene, settling for a relatively safe teacher’s life where the nearest I got to the days of Marquee madness was leading junior assembly with a wobbly rendition of ‘Who Put The Colours In The Rainbow?’ But now, like an unsettling acid flashback, I was being reminded of things better swept under the carpet – and torn between quickening pace and investigating the source of my discomfort.



No sooner had the dilemma occurred to me when I was struck by the sounds that should have hit me from the first. Admittedly they weren’t the conventional sounds a busker might make, but we do get a pretty diverse bunch of misfits wooing us along this bustling city-centre precinct. Geordies are, by and large, pretty generous in their acceptance of street entertainers – in fact diversions of all kinds, especially those in black and white – but this was certainly something different. A stooped

figure, slunk back in a derelict shop doorway, was stomping out a steady rhythm whilst blowing ethereal sounds on a toy-like harmonica, cupped invisibly in bony fingers. I didn't notice a definable melody at first, but then began to detect snatches of 'Going Back To Memphis' and other jug band favourites, but it could have been my imagination. Or it may also have been the intermittent coughs and splutters peppering the performance that confused me, along with some dramatic fluctuations in volume.

*I'm going back to Memphis moma don't you want to go?
yes I'm going back to Memphis moma don't you want to go?
coz I'm sick and tired of all this ice and snow*⁽¹¹⁾

Stepping back uncertainly, I found a vantage point on one of those chunky vandal-proof benches kindly installed by the City Council for the benefit of elderly citizens or, more likely, the countless inebriates stumbling about the Toon after dark. If this really was my Arthur, and I was unconvinced, assuming that if he wasn't dead he'd be rotting in a jail or asylum somewhere, there were a million questions bubbling just below the surface I wasn't sure I wanted answering. The last time we were together in the flesh was at that dire battle of the bands contest, solo acoustic section, though I'd seen his wrinkly choir-boy features on TV and in the tabloids several times since. But that was back in the late Seventies or early Eighties. Frankly, I'd had enough of his rocky follies by then and the fiasco in Wardour Street felt like the inevitable end to a seedy affair; and something I was quite relieved to be out of. At least I knew, once and for all and without any question, the music business was not for me. I'd experienced its murky underbelly and realised that, like watching horror movies, what might seem like fun from the comfort of an arm chair, having the bare-arsed reality shoved in your face was not such a giggle. Spinal Tap, I discovered, was an affectionate documentary not a comedy.

After the fracas, which I'd inadvertently instigated between the two tribes, there'd been one hack who'd realised there was more to this story than a few busted heads. He'd tracked down Arthur, the target of my jibes, and outed him. It was a shit thing to do, but when did journalists ever let better feelings get in the way of a good story?

You might turn that around and say, what about me? Did I ever think about Arthur's feelings when I stood up in front of hundreds of punters and made a lyrical mockery of him? Surely I should have known, or reasonably guessed, that my stupid piss-take might backfire? But then, if asked to defend it, I'd have fallen back on that old entertainer's excuse - just a joke mate (got no sense of humour?) using not-very-poetic license - exaggerating certain aspects of my old friend's persona for dramatic effect. Surely, something artists have been doing since the dawn of exhibitionism? The difference being though, when comics take the piss, their targets are usually figures who've elected to live in the public eye and therefore accept, or come to expect, the mocking consequences. Arthur, on the other hand, never sought the dubious prize of popular acclaim, indeed he vehemently shunned it. I not only blew his cover but made fun of his most admirable characteristics and then, adding insult to injury, concocted a whole bunch of stupid lies - and all simply to get a cheap laugh.

And why? In a vain bid to win some stupid contest that meant nothing to me. Even today I can't watch TV talent shows, which seem not only devoid of originality, wit or integrity (would any of our great British rock innovators last five minutes?) but wince with embarrassment at the depths some people will sink to get noticed. Wince, not for them, but in memory of my own wretched attempts to attract attention. Though, to be fair, at least I was trying to do something different, artistically speaking. (Huh?).

But maybe, if I'm truly honest, it was also an act of vengeance - my way of hitting back, several years too late, for his part in the Geronimo fiasco. Though I'd always wanted to

be a star (what kid doesn't?) and Arthur had landed me that chance on a plate, I'd gone and blown it. One-hit wonders have something of a laughable reputation, often unfairly, but in my case it was well deserved. Who, apart from a few aged pirate radio jocks and some equally decrepit aficionados of obscure European pop, recall my bizarre 1964 assault on the charts? Almost big in Belgium, even Latvia, less so in Moldovia and barely knee high in the Ukraine, didn't quite cut the mustard down Denmark Street, never mind Fulham High Street. It wasn't the financial or personal failure which had been most devastating, but rather the mental meltdown that had followed. And, though I liked to think I was now a better man, maybe I still held grudges - and why not?

I must admit to venturing deep into the attic for the lyrics, found eventually in one of many battered cardboard boxes full of old song books, faded LPs, knackered instruments, broken sound equipment and piles of cassette tapes, etc. Although, as said previously, my mind occasionally trawls up ancient lyrical memorabilia - I never learned more than a bare minimum of 'Give The Singer-Songwriter A Bloody Chance' - snippets of it's many verses floating back to me as I sat eyeing the busker. Why did I make up that stuff about his guitar? The chord change confusion? Total lies. As a boy, Arthur had won acceptance as a cathedral chorister and could read most scores put in front of him. Likewise, if the mood grabbed him, he could make a decent stab at playing virtually any stringed instrument within no time and keyboards were always a doddle.

The truth was, if I'd guts to admit it, the song was more about me than him. I was the struggling singer-songwriter, not Arthur Grimsby. He'd really been quite successful by his own measure, not only as a man who'd found a happy vocational niche, but also on a personal level as a popular guy on the scene. He'd had friends at all levels who valued his free and easy advice and support or, quite simply, his excellent company. If he'd lived a meandering, apparently aimless and unconventional life outside the law - so what?

- Had I been envious?
- Was I perhaps angrier with myself for not having the courage to follow his advice?
- And had I done what he said, laid myself on the line as it were, would I have achieved all my youthful ambitions?
- Or died a tragic and pointless death long ago as he (maybe) and so many others had done?
- And was now the time to ponder these questions? But did I have a choice?

Even if this wailing relic was not who or what he appeared to be, a miraculous survivor of a monster masher, or a ghost come back to mess with my mind, these were serious questions that deserved consideration, if not actual answers.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter 2

(1) Premature Musician Deaths – name and age of demise.

1950s: Hank Williams – 29, Johnny Ace – 25, Buddy Holly – 22, The Big Bopper – 28, Ritchie Valens – 17,

1960s: Eddie Cochran – 21, Stuart Sutcliffe – 21, Cyril Davis – 31, Rudy Lewis – 27, Johnny Burnette – 30, Alan Freed – 43, Bill Black – 39, Richard Farina – 29, Bobby Fuller – 23, Johnny Kidd – 30, Joe Meek – 37, Brian Epstein – 32, Otis Reading – 26, Little Walter – 37, Frankie Lymon – 25, Martin Lamble – 19, Little Willie John – 30, Brian Jones – 27,

1970s: Alan Wilson – 27, Jimi Hendrix – 27, Janis Joplin – 27, Jim Morrison – 27, King Curtis 37, Gene Voncent – 36, Duane Allman – 24, Clyde MnPhatter – 39, Brian Cole – 29,

Rory Storm 33, Billy Murcia – 21, Barry Oakley – 24, Gram Parsons – 26, Jim Croce – 30, Bobby Darin – 37, Cass Elliot – 34, Nick Drake – 26, Tim Buckley – 28, Al Jackson – 39, Paul Kossoff – 25, Phil Ochs – 35, Keith Relf – 33, Jimmy Reed – 50, Tommy Bolin – 25, Elvis Presley – 42, Marc Bolan – 29, Sandy Denny – 31, Keith Moon – 32, Donny Hathaway – 33, Sid Vicious – 21, Lowell George – 24, Jimmy McCulloch – 26,

1980s: Ben Scott – 33, Ian Curtis – 23, John Bonham – 32, John Lennon – 40, Tim Hardin – 39, Bill Haley – 55, Mike Bloomfield – 37, Bob Hite – 36, Bob Marley – 36, Harry Chapin – 38, Lester Bangs – 33, James Honeyman-Scott – 25, Joe Tex – 49, Marty Robbins – 57, Billy Fury – 42, Karen Carpenter – 32, Danny Rapp – 41, Pete Farndon – 30, Chris Wood – 39, Tom Evans – 36, Dennis Wilson – 39, Jackie Wilson, Marvin Gaye – 44, Ian Stewart – 47, Ricky Nelson – 45, Phil Lynott – 36, Richard Manuel – 42, O’Kelly Isley – 48, Cliff Burton – 24, Carlton Barrett – 36, Paul Butterfield – 44, Gary Driscoll – 41, Peter Tosh – 42, Andy Gibb – 30, Hillel Slovak – 26, Nico – 49, Roy Orbison – 52, Pete de Freitas – 28,

1990s: Allen Collins – 37, Del Shannon – 55, Johnnie Ray – 63, Ric Grech – 43, Jim Hodder – 42, Brent Mydland – 37, Stevie Ray Vaughan – 35, Tom Fogerty – 48, Steve Clark – 30, Steve Marriott – 44, Johnny Thunders – 38, David Ruffin – 50, Rob Tyner – 36, Ole Beich – 36, Eric Carr – 41, Freddie Mercury – 45, Jerry Nolan – 45, Mary Wells – 49, Jeff Porcaro – 38, Eddie Hazel – 42, Mick Ronson – 47, Frank Zappa – 52, Michael Clark – 47, Harry Nilsson – 52, Kurt Cobain – 27, Lee Brilleaux, Derek Leckenby – 51, Nicky Hopkins – 50, Danny Gatton – 49, Fred ‘Sonic’ Smith – 45, Selena – 23, Rory Gallagher – 47, Wolfman Jack – 57, Jerry Garcia – 53, Alan Hull – 50, Brad Nowell – 28, Chas Chandler – 57, Jeff Buckley – 30, Ronnie Lane – 51, John Denver – 53, Michael Hutchence – 37, Sonny Bono – 61, Carl Wilson – 51, Cozy Powell – 50, Dusty Springfield – 50, Screaming Lord Sutch – 58, Curtis Mayfield – 57.

2000s: Ian Dury – 57, Heinz Burt – 57, Allen Woody – 44, David Brown – 53, Benjamin Orr – 53, Kirsty MacColl – 41, Jerry Ramone – 49, George Harrison – 58, Jon Lee – 33, Layne Staley – 34, Dee Dee Ramone – 50, Robbin Crosby – 42, John Entwistle – 57, Joe Strummer – 50, Maurice Gibb – 53, Howie Epstein – 47, Warren Zevon – 56, Johnny Cash – 71, Robert Palmer – 54, Elliot Smith – 34, Ray Charles – 73, Johnny Ramone – 55, Dimebag Darrell – 38, Jim Capaldi – 60, Long John Baldry – 64, Mike Gibbins – 56, John ‘Beatz’ Holohan – 31, Billy Preston – 59, Syd Barrett – 60, John Martyn – 61, Amy Winehouse – 27.

Note: I have excluded any person or band I’d not previously heard of and deaths over the age of 50, with a few exceptions (they were important musicians or their name was just too good to miss out, e.g. Fred ‘Sonic’ Smith or Dimebag Darrell). Also excluded are musicians from non-mainstream genres such as jazz, folk, country, etc, as well as the many hundreds (thousands?) less well known. Though I have not mentioned how each died (the information is easily obtained on many web sites) it seems that a very high proportion met their end through drink or drug misuse, or unnatural cause such as suicide, murder or violent accident. Apologies to any fans, friends and relatives of those omitted.

(2) From Monty Python’s ‘Dead Parrot’ sketch, which reaches its peak with: “‘E’s kicked the bucket, ‘e’s shuffled off ‘is mortal coil, run down the curtain and joined the bleedin’ choir invisible! This is an ex-parrot!” First transmitted in Dec. 1969, BBC2 TV.

(3) Big Jim Sullivan is an English guitarist whose music career started in 1959 and has played on over a thousand charting singles. In 1959 he met Marty Wilde at the 2i’s coffee bar and was invited to become a member of his backing group, the Wildcats. Jack Good introduced him to session work on the set of the TV series Oh Boy that he was producing. He went on to become one of the most sought after guitarists throughout the 1960s and 1970s due to his

flexibility in playing different styles of music. In 1969 Sullivan joined Tom Jones and spent the next five years touring with him and it was during that time in Las Vegas he met and formed a friendship with Elvis Presley. He left Tom Jones in 1974 and teamed up with Derek Lawrence, record producer, and together they formed a record label, Retreat Records, handling various artists including Deep Purple, Wishbone Ash, Labi Siffre, Chas and Dave and McGuinness Flint. Sullivan also fronted a band himself called Tiger, putting out three albums. In 1978 he became part of the James Last Orchestra for nine years and also toured with Olivia Newton-John. From 1987 Sullivan composed music for films and advertising jingles. In recent years Sullivan and guitarist Doug Pruden have been touring as the BJS Duo and he also plays in the Big Jim Sullivan Band with Duncan McKenzie, Malcolm Mortimore and Pete Shaw. In 2006 Sullivan was featured in the Guitar Maestros VD series.
www.bigjimsullivan.com

(4) Albert Lee was born in Leominster, England, in 1943. He took up the piano and accordion aged seven but changed to guitar after five years and became a professional musician at sixteen. He spent the mid Sixties as a top R&B guitarist, but in the 1970s became one of the leading rockabilly and country guitarists in the world. In England he's been a household name, and in Nashville and Los Angeles he's been one of the most in-demand session guitarists there is. Occasionally he's misidentified with guitarist Alvin Lee - the latter being a much flashier player (though brilliant too).
Bruce Eder – CMT Biographies – www.cmt.com/artists/az/lee_albert/bio

(5) Micky Waller (1944 – 2008) was a drummer who played with many of the biggest names on the UK rock and blues scene since he went professional in the early Sixties. These included Joe Brown, Cyril Davies, Long John Baldry, Georgie Fame, Marty Wilde, Rod Stewart, Julie Driscoll, Cliff Richard, Brian Auger, John Mayall, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, Jo Ann Kelly, Terry Smith, etc. During all this time he also worked as a session player with the above artists and many others.
From an Obituary in The Guardian, 2008.

(6) Jimmy Page, OBE, born 9 Jan. 1944, is an English guitarist, songwriter and record producer. He began his career as a studio session player in London and was subsequently a member of The Yardbirds (1966-68) and later founded Led Zeppelin. He is described by Allmusic as, 'one of the all-time most influential, important, and versatile guitarists and songwriters in rock history'. Also by Rolling Stone as, 'probably the most digitally sample artist in pop today after James Brown'. In 2010, Page was ranked #2 in Gibson's list of 'Top 50 Guitarists of All Time'. Other magazines, etc, have also ranked him highly. During the Sixties he played on numerous recordings by such artists as The Who, The Kinks, Marianne Faithfull, The Nashville Teens, The Rolling Stones, Van Morrison & Them, Dave Berry, Joe Cocker, Al Stewart and many more. To distinguish him from 'Big Jim' Sullivan he was often dubbed 'Little Jim'. One reason he preferred studio work was that during a touring stint with a band called the Crusaders in the early Sixties, he contracted glandular fever and was afraid this may re-occur in similar circumstances. For a while he also concentrated on his love of painting and enrolled at Sutton College for the same reason. During his session work days he played on so many records he has said it is now hard to remember which ones he played on. In a radio interview he said, 'I was doing three sessions a day, fifteen sessions a week. Sometimes I would be playing with a group, sometimes I would be doing film music, it could be a folk session... I was able to fit in all these different roles.'
www.jimmypage.co.uk/biography . Greg Prato – 'Jimmy Page Biography' – Allmusic – www.allmusic.com and www.rollingstone.com/artists/jimmypage

(7) 'Life', Keith Richards autobiography, published by Orion Books, 2010.

(8) Chess Records was an American record label based in Chicago, Illinois. It specialized in blues, R&B, soul, gospel music, early rock and roll, and occasional jazz releases. Run by brothers Leonard and Phil Chess, the company produced and released many important singles and albums, which are now regarded as central to the rock music canon. Musician and critic Cub Koda described Chess Records as "America's greatest blues label."^[1] The Chess Records catalogue is now owned by Universal Music Group and managed by Geffen Records. Chess Records was based at several different locations on the south side of Chicago, Illinois, initially at two different locations on South Cottage Grove Ave.^[2] The most famous location was 2120 S. Michigan Avenue from around 1956 to 1965, immortalized by British rock group The Rolling Stones in "2120 South Michigan Avenue", an instrumental recorded at that address during their first U.S. tour in 1964; the Stones would record at Chess Studios on two more occasions. The building is now home to Willie Dixon's Blues Heaven Foundation. In the mid-60s, Chess re-located to a much larger building at 320 E. 21st. St, the label's final Chicago home.^[2]

(9) A 'nanker', according to Keith Richards (Ibid), 'is a look – the face stretched to horrible contortions by the fingers inserted into all available orifices – a great Brian speciality.' Nanker Phelge, the pen name of Keith and Mick, came from this; also a guy named James Phelge roomed with the Stones when they lived together at a flat in Edith Grove, Chelsea, when they were starting out in the early Sixties.

(10) Despite any reservations about Ian Stewart's image, Keith Richards acknowledges his huge significance in establishing the Rolling Stones. He says, 'I don't think the Stones would have actually coagulated without Ian Stewart pulling it together. He was the one that rented the first rehearsal rooms, told people to get there at a certain time; otherwise it was so nebulous. We didn't know shit from Shinola. It was his vision, the band, and basically he picked who was to be in it. Far more than anybody actually realises, he was the spark and the energy and the organisation that actually kept it together in its early days.' Keith Richards – *ibid.*

(11) *GOING BACK TO MEMPHIS*

well I'm going back to Memphis - moma don't you want to go? (x2)
coz. I'm sick and tired of all this ice and snow

when I get back to Memphis - you can bet I'll stay (x2)
ain't gonna leave until the judgment day

I love old Memphis - the place where I was born (x2)
wear my box-back suit and drink my fine old corn

I wrote my gal a letter - way down in Tennessee (x2)
told her I was up here hungry - hurry up and send for me

Written and recorded by the Memphis Jug Band with Gus Cannon and Noah Lewis – 1930s (exact date not known). Subsequently re-recorded by them and others in the 1950s and 60s (and many more of their songs).

