

(LEFT TO RIGHT) COLIN BLUNSTONE, HUGH GRUNDY, CHRIS WHITE, ROD ARGENT



CHRIS WHITE AND HUGH GRUNDY: This Will Be Our Year Again

BY DANIEL COSTON

FOR THOSE OF US THAT GOT TO SEE THE ZOMBIES' REUNION *Odessey & Oracle* shows this past March, part of the joy was seeing Chris White and Hugh Grundy on stage again with the band. While vocalist COLIN BLUNSTONE and keyboardist ROD ARGENT are the best-known members, it is the combining of their talents with bassist White, and drummer Grundy, that made The Zombies so special both then, and now.

While Grundy has stayed active in various things since the band's late '60 breakup, White has continued to write and produce a wide array of music. His latest CD, *The Key*, is the creation of WHITE CIRCLE, which consists of White, his wife VIV BOUCHERAT, and White's son MATTHEW. 40 years after 1968's *Odessey*, *The Key* provides another taste of White's amazing talents.

For a fan, doing these interviews via email with White and Grundy was a lot of fun. And if what White says is true, another Zombies road trip may be in my future!

DC: How did the recent *Odessey & Oracle* shows come about?

CHRIS: We [The Zombies] had been looking at the possibility of doing *Odessey & Oracle* live for some time. I had been impressed by BRIAN WILSON's shows for *Pet Sounds* and *Smile*. We then realized that we were coming up to the 40th anniversary of the album's release, and had an offer to do the three shows at the Shepherd's Bush

Empire in London. Now it looks like we will repeat the celebration of *O&O* in America next Spring. The concerts will be one-offs as Rod and Colin are still gigging with their touring Zombies band.

HUGH: Chris and I started talking about the possibilities some three years ago, and then we talked to Rod about it and he said yes. So we tried a small rehearsal at his house and it went really well, and gradually the idea became reality.

DC: You've reunited with the other members of The Zombies including the late [guitarist] PAUL ATKINSON for a couple of one-off appearances [all five first played a few songs together when *The Zombies* box set *Zombie Heaven* was released, at London's Jazz Café, November 25, 1997—ed.], but what was it like to play a full show, and play those songs over three nights?

CHRIS: It felt like yesterday. When you have all grown up together and had the same exciting experiences, it never goes away. We grew up musically together and that won't fade.

HUGH: We did do a concert in L.A. [January 27, 2004, House of Blues] playing just two songs with Paul, who sadly died about two months afterwards, and that was very poignant. But it had to wait three years before we did Shepherd's Bush Empire to play *O & O* in its entirety.

DC: I heard that you rehearsed in everyone's living rooms for these shows, as you did before recording *Odessey*. Is that true?

CHRIS: Not quite. We played around on the piano in Rod's studio first, just to see if it was possible. Then we rehearsed once a week for about five sessions at **JIM RODFORD's** front room [Rodford is in Argent and Blunstone's current touring/recording *Zombies* band] with Jim and **Viv [BOUCHERAT]** as the extra harmonies, and then two days in a rehearsal room with **DARIAN SAHANAJA** [of *THE WONDERMINTS*] and the brass players a few days before the concert.

DC: What did you take away from those shows? Memories, experiences, and such.

CHRIS: A wonderful feeling of justification about an album that wasn't successful at all when it was released 40 years ago! Great warmth from the audience and all those involved. A realization that so many young musicians considered *O&O* an important album. Performing the album for the first time ever! Having **PAUL WELLER** and **ROBERT PLANT** come backstage along with others including **TIM RICE**. Joy!

HUGH: No two ways about it, the experience was quite extraordinary, leaving me with the most wonderful memories and of course a fantastic DVD of the show!

DC: Looking back, would you ever have expected to celebrating *Odessey* some 40 years on?

CHRIS: When we finished recording it, we felt it was the culmination of everything we wanted to do. Rod and I felt very pleased with our first production—for us it worked. Then nobody wanted it! It has only become popular in the last 15 years so. [Well, aside from a blockbuster posthumous 1969 #3 U.S. hit single, "Time of the Season!!!"] At the time we thought it was a commercial failure and that reality was one of the main reasons we split up.

HUGH: No, I would never have expected The *Zombies* and *O&O* to play such a part in my life.

DC: Chris, Let's talk about your new *White Circle* CD. I've really enjoyed listening to it. How did that record come about?

CHRIS: With *The Key*, we wanted to create a hypnotic wall of texture with a choir of Slavic massed voices coupled with gospel voices, with guest soloists and modern rhythms plus strong songs. After completing three tracks, we researched its commercial viability by playing the tracks to music-based people and found that practically all found it incredibly visual and haunting. Although trying not to be obvious about it, the basic underlying "story" is a girl waking in the morning at that moment just before all her dreams fall out of her head. In our story, all the dreams that the girl has had whilst asleep come back to her in that drowsy half-sleep state. Her real-life experiences, previous life experiences, memories, fantasies and other deeper universal truths become mixed together in her conscious mind on waking. These images quickly fade as she faces the new day, though she is left with an overall spiritual feeling of hope.

DC: Tell me how you both got involved in music.

CHRIS: Always been excited about music; classical, jazz and rock together. I had several small groups including a skiffle group while I was at school. My father played double bass as an amateur and several relations were musicians.

HUGH: As I grew up I had always enjoyed music, especially as rock 'n' roll was in its infancy.

DC: How did you come to join The *Zombies*?

CHRIS: I was at art school doing fine art and still playing music when I was asked by an old school friend [**TERRY ARNOLD** who was managing The *Zombies* at the time] if I wanted join this new young group. I went along to one of their Sunday rehearsals and we clicked. Colin went to my old school and the other three were from another school in St. Albans.

HUGH: It was at school I joined the school corps band as drummer, and Rod seemed to think I had a good sense of rhythm.

DC: Tell me about the early days of the band, and the events leading up to winning the talent contest.

HUGH: We would play all the local gigs in and around St. Albans and built a good local following.

CHRIS: We used to play small local gigs. We had fun working with primitive equipment, putting any money we got in to amps, etc. That went on for about two or three years. Then I finished my degree and the some of the others were thinking about going to university. A competition was announced, and we thought it would be fun to enter before we all had to split up. Winning the "Hert's Beat Competition" was one of our greatest experiences. The offers came after that and we took good advice from one of my professional uncles, and signed the best deal we could with **KEN JONES** and **JOE RONCORONI** [producers who signed them to Decca Records]. I put off for a year my teaching degree and the others put off University as well. Then "She's Not There" went to #1 in America. End of story!

DC: Chris, when did you start writing songs for The *Zombies*?

CHRIS: Although I had been writing songs before The *Zombies*, they were only the triumph of optimism over experience. But when we had our first recording session coming up, Rod wrote "She's Not There" and I wrote the B-side which was "You Make Me Feel Good." Both songs were—I can say it now—pretty good for first time efforts. [err; not bad!!!—ed.] After that, we really only wanted to record our own stuff. There were a few songs recorded which were from our live work, but original was better.

DC: How important was the partnership that you had with Rod Argent?

CHRIS: Vital. As we started together, that's how we went on. It was new territory but we believed we could do it! When it came to trying out new stuff, we would all work on the songs 'round a piano in Rod's parents house, trying out harmonies, changing chords and bass lines, etc.. We would only work on stuff that we all liked. Rod was very good at hearing the whole arrangement in his head, which was something I learned from him. Sometimes Rod would hear a song I was working on from the next room, and he would rush in with an idea or a comment, which was very useful. We nearly always agreed on the direction when producing, as well. Let's face it, you can't spend all that time working together if you fundamentally disagree.

DC: Tell me about playing America in 1964.

CHRIS: The first and only gig we did in America in December '64 was [New York radio DJ] **MURRAY THE K's** Christmas special in New York [Brooklyn Fox, with **SHANGRI-LA's**, **CHUCK JACKSON**, **BEN E. KING**, **SHIRELLES**, **DRIFTERS**, and more!]. It was like our magic land. We played eight shows a day over the Christmas holidays. The sounds, people and atmosphere were so different to our English experience. And we met and played with so many of our musical heroes. In '65 we did two tours. First with The **DICK CLARK** Caravan Of Stars, and then with **THE SEARCHERS**.

HUGH: Our first trip to the US was to New York where we played the Brooklyn Fox, for several nights over Christmas. An amazing experience. Next we did a tour all over America traveling one night, then hotel for the other. Absolutely exhausting, but being young, we didn't mind. Of course it was at a time when not many people went to America.

DC: There's a wonderful clip of The *Zombies* miming "She's Not There" on the *Hulabaloo* U.S. TV show in 1965, and girls are just screaming their heads off. What was it like to be the focus of that kind of attention?

CHRIS: What fun. The screaming was something we had already seen when The Beatles performed, so in a way it was expected. But being chased by over-enthusiastic fans holding scissors wasn't so

THE ZOMBIES ODESSEY & ORACLE

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much fun!

HUGH: I think for a young man it was really incredible, like it was not happening to us.

DC: What did you view your role in the band, both onstage and off?

CHRIS: We all worked together. It was a team, and there were no special roles, except that Rod was definitely the leader. I was just the bass player and other songwriter.

HUGH: Obviously, I was the drummer, and together with Chris we were the foundation, the backbone of The Zombies. Offstage I did a bit of driving; other than that, just one of the band.

DC: After the release of "Tell Her No," the following singles weren't able to chart, despite all being top quality. Why? And how tough was that on the band? Particularly since the singles market was so important at the time.

CHRIS: Innocently, we *expected* our first single to chart. After that we grew up and realized how difficult the game was. We increasingly grew dissatisfied with the production of our records as we were not allowed to be at the mixing. Ken did a great job to start with, but he then seemed to make the recordings a little too wispy for our liking. We were harder and stronger musically than that. We then did our own production but were still working with Ken and Joe.

HUGH: I think there was a creeping feeling of sadness and despair that we couldn't repeat previous successes. That led to the eventual break up of the band.

DC: I just saw the 1965 film *Bunny Lake Is Missing* on U.S. TV. What are your memories of recording, and performing in the movie?

CHRIS: Weird. **OTTO PREMINGER** was a hard director. They hired the *Top Of The Pops* TV studio to film us in with all the usual TV crew in as well, and we spent several days filming. When we saw the film at the premier we just appeared on a TV screen in a pub behind a scene involving **LAURENCE OLIVIER** and **KEIR DULLEA**. For that we got equal billing with the main stars! Then Otto wanted us to do a promotional film which involved someone adapting the lyrics to Colin's song, which turned from "Just Out Of Reach" to "Come On Time." The gimmick was that nobody was supposed to come in to

the Cinema after the film started!

HUGH: Like a bit of madness, really. It was eye-opening to see the film world at work, but great fun to do.

DC: Chris, several of your songs have been covered by other artists. What was it like to have "I Love You" become a [1968 #5] hit for another band [San Jose, CA band **THE PEOPLE**] in the U.S.?

CHRIS: The previously mentioned "You Make Me Feel Good" was recorded by an American harmony group, but I can't remember who! One of my favorites was "Leave Me Be" by **SONNY & CHER** that was a B-side on one of their singles. It was a [Phil] Spector-type recording and I loved it. I always thought "I Love You" was a possible single, but at the time "Whenever You're Ready" was a better choice for the A side—"I Love You" was the B-side. The People did a fine job and I didn't find out about until much later! In fact, Colin and Rod's version that they do with the touring Zombies [today] is nearer to that version than the original Zombies' recording! It is interesting to hear other recordings of your songs—hearing a different slant to it.

DC: You mentioned The Zombies' current touring lineup, which is led by Colin and Rod. How do you feel about all of that?

CHRIS: Rod and Colin touring as The Zombies? Well, it kind of fell into being. They started out as "Rod Argent & Colin Blunstone," because Rod didn't want to be The Zombies. Now they are officially (and on their contracts) Rod Argent & Colin Blunstone of The Zombies, but no promoter is putting that on the posters and advertising. Apart from being slightly confusing for some punters, I have no problem with them going out as The Zombies touring band, as long as we [the originals] get to do the few important anniversary *Odessey & Oracle* gigs in America. The touring band are great musicians and they worked with us on stage performing *O&O* at Shepherds Bush Empire. Don't forget we all go back to our schooldays together. That's a long time!

DC: In retrospect, how much did the Philippines experiences [a dispute with a promoter who paid them next to nothing after they drew hundreds of thousands of fans, then threatened them] hasten the end of performing, and eventually the end of the band?

CHRIS: Not at all. In fact it strengthened our resolve to do our

own recordings. It was quite an experience though! It's not often that you get threatened with death by the promoter if you play for someone else!

DC: Did the chance to record *Odessey* through CBS come as a surprise?

CHRIS: No. Our Decca contract ended and Jo and Ken came up with the CBS U.K. deal. An album for £1,000—no advances—they didn't exist in those days.

DC: Did you approach the writing of *Odessey* any differently than how you had written before?

CHRIS: I don't think so. Though for the first time we controlled the whole palette of arrangements and sounds in the studio. We just wrote and used the songs as we went along. There was nothing left unused. A tight budget is a fine critical judge! If something didn't work, it was on to the next song. Also, the songs were written as we went along. We didn't have all the songs ready before we started, as far as I can recall. Because it was 4-track recording in Abbey Road, we had to be tight and well-rehearsed.

DC: What are your memories of recording it?

CHRIS: Great being in Abbey Road! Lots of rehearsals before recording. Three songs—usually—in three hour shifts. Excitement and hard work. We had to work fast within our £1,000 budget. We were very happy listening back to the mixes—on acetates in those days. It was all recorded on 4-track machines, the same as The Beatles, and we were lucky to have [Beatles engineer] **GEOFF EMERICK** as one of our engineers.

HUGH: I remember Abbey Road and what a pleasure it was to record there!

DC: While *Odessey* has touches of the year it was recorded in, in other ways it feels timeless. Was that something you were striving for, and were you even aware of that at the time?

CHRIS: Ken Jones once told us at the start of our career that, "If you can record something that's commercial and classy, then you're made." Well, *O&O* was classy we think, but commerciality came 25 years later! We just recorded songs that we wrote and all agreed on.

HUGH: I don't think we were aware it would become timeless—but it's wonderful that it has, and so many new people have been introduced to our music.

DC: Chris, I got married in October, and our first dance was to "This Will Be Our Year." [a song, we found out last issue, that **R.E.M.'s MICHAEL STIPE** also sang at his sister **LINDA**'s wedding by request!—ed.] How did that song come about, and what does it mean to you?

CHRIS: Hope and optimism are two things I always strived for. Two of my biggest songs are "This Will Be Our Year" and [**ARGENT's** 1972 #5] "Hold Your Head Up." It is a long way back, but I was probably infatuated with somebody at the time and felt good about the future. I still do feel good about the future.

DC: What did you do after The Zombies breakup?

CHRIS: Rod and I wanted to continue in music, so we put together and financed Rod's group Argent. We continued writing and recording. I produced several albums for different people, including **MICHAEL FENNELLY** and the early demos for **DIRE STRAITS**. There were also two albums with **MATTHEW FISHER** [**PROCOL HAREM**] and, of course,

Colin's first three albums. I have always been a writer, and I don't think my life would be as good if I stopped. It is the creating that is important. Besides, I can't do anything else.

HUGH: I did many things. I was with CBS records in the A&R department for quite a few years. I drive for the RAF [Royal Air Force] now.

DC: After the success of "Time Of The Season," was there ever a point when you wished that The Zombies hadn't broken up?

CHRIS: A little, after we toured America with Argent's first tour. Rod and I lost as much money on that tour with Argent as the fake Zombies [formed to capitalize and cash in, with no original members] were making in a night! Argent took all our enthusiasm, so we didn't really feel that we could reform The Zombies. It might, just might, have been fun, though. Rod and I had worked so hard putting Argent together, and encouraging others to join, that it would have been difficult to concentrate on both The Zombies and Argent.

HUGH: I personally wished we hadn't broken up; if we had stuck it out, I think better times were ahead.



HUGH (LEFT) AND CHRIS (RIGHT), 1960's

DC: Several of my friends in the music business knew Paul Atkinson, and all have had wonderful things to say about him. What would you like people to know about him?

CHRIS: Paul was always a straight-talker and a lovely person. A hard worker with no side to him. What he did in his later career in A&R was phenomenal. The love that was given to him at his benefit show at the House Of Blues in L.A. was almost touchable. He insisted that he play on stage with us, even though he was very ill.

HUGH: Paul was a lovely man, and our friend. We miss him very much.

DC: There are now people who have been listening to music that you've been a part of for over 40 years; and those who are just now discovering *Odessey*. What would you like to say to them?

CHRIS: Music is an international language. Almost a currency. Spread pleasure and be inspired to create things for yourself. Listen to the best. As **RAY CHARLES** said, "There are only two types of music, good and bad." And don't confine yourself to one type of music—find pleasure in all types. Enjoy. ☺