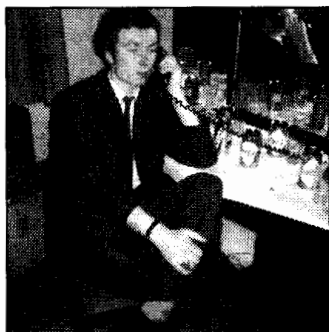


THE ANSWERS

an interview with Vince Edwards by Lenny Helsing

Tony Hill's first professional group the Answers were a four-piece outfit from the northeast corner of England, just outside Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. They didn't make it big back in their day, but have since found some kind of eternal fame due to their song "It's Just A Fear" finding its way onto numerous compilations released in the early-to-mid '80s and beyond, and now being enjoyed by ever more garage and psych music fanatics the world over. Like a lot of groups from that era the Answers were signed to a major deal, in their case it was EMI's Columbia label, where they released two singles during the first half of 1966. They poured everything they could muster into "It's Just A Fear" and should have set the world on fire such is the combustible energy that emanates from the group's performance.

While Tony Hill was the Answers' exceptional lead guitarist and songwriter, the vocalist was Vince Edwards, who also doubled as the drummer. Vince is also a songwriter, having penned many songs and stage shows that have brought huge successes for him and a variety of internationally acclaimed singers. Most famously he penned "Right Back Where We Started From," a huge hit for Maxine Nightingale in 1975 and an acknowledged Northern Soul classic. Recently, we established contact with Vince, who now resides in Germany. He's still gigging with a group, some of who were originally with the late 1960s Belgian outfit the Pebbles. Moreover, he is still belting out some of the cool old R&B standards and enjoying every minute. What follows is the scoop on his days with the Answers, his subsequent solo career, and beyond.



On tour, 1963.
Vince on the phone to their agent:
"Where's our money?"



THE ANSWERS, December 1964.
L to R: Vince Edwards, Tony Hill, Eddy Nicholls.

UT: I suppose the first thing to ask you is how and when did you all meet up in the first place?

VE: The Answers got together in 1963, I had been lead singer with a local band called the Invictors, from '62. Tony Hill had been lead guitar with a band called the Vampires - cloaks and all! Tony played a Gretsch Firebird, Bob Calder was our bass player on a red Burns, and Ronnie (we never knew his second name) played good lead on a Gibson. I played on a blue Rogers kit. Bob and Ronnie joined after Edd Nicholls (guitar) and Harry Brown (bass) left the group to pursue a normal life. (Harry Brown has since passed away and Edd Nicholls has his own church in Jarrow.)

UT: You started out as the vocalist in the group, but you also wound up being the drummer too. How did this happen?

VE: Our original drummer, Jimmy Grey, got headhunted by a working men's club in South Shields on the same night we played a farewell gig there. That's one of the reasons I put together, a lot later on, the act known as 'Startum on 45 Pints', to have a little pop at our affiliated working men's clubs. I think they asked us at the time if we could play "without the boxes" - meaning the amps - but that's another story... Anyway, it was only two nights before we were due to leave for a tour of US airbases in France, and there was no time to find a drummer so we clubbed together and bought an old drum kit and a drum pad so I could learn in the van on the way to Verdun, in France. The

last we saw of Jimmy Grey's Ludwig drums was when the kids on our housing estate started banging away on them after Tony and me had thrown them and the drummer out of the van at the bottom of our street when he told us he was leaving! Tony had just packed up his job in the shipyards with only six months of his apprenticeship left. I had already quit the shipyards a year before, the first apprentice ever to quit Swanhunters.

UT: How difficult was it to suddenly find yourself behind a drum kit and have to do the singing too?

VE: The first song I learned was "Route 66" by Chuck Berry, and I thought that if I could sing and play this at the same time then the rest should be easy.

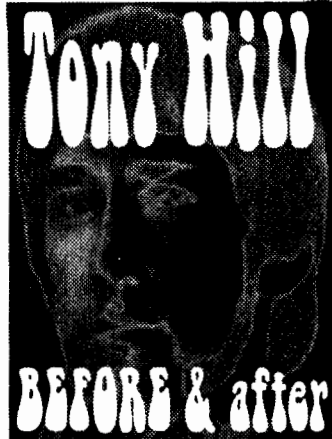
UT: What year was this?

VE: This was back in November '63. I can still feel the cold.

UT: Can you recall which songs the group were performing in the live set back then, and if there were any original songs included?

VE: Our songs then were John Lee Hooker, Jimmy Reed, Sonny Boy Williamson, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, R&B and soul. Then later we did James Brown, Temptations, Sam Cooke, and a couple of Tony Hill songs. "You've Gotta Believe Me" (the flip of "It's Just A Fear") and "That's What Your Doing" and "Got A Letter" (the second Columbia single) were all written by Tony.

UT: Aside from making a tour of the American airbases in France, can you recall any memorable shows or tours that the group undertook, either in Britain or other parts of



Europe?

VE: We played a big open air concert in Oxford in '66 I think, with Joe Cocker, Alex Harvey Soul Band and lots of bands that were around at the time, we followed the Yardbirds...

UT: Wow! That must've been a tough act to follow, did you watch their show?

VE: Yeah, they were great. It was when they had the two lead guitarists. They had a good day! In fact we got to thinking, Hang on, these guys are so far ahead of us y'know? That was when I wanted to move more into R&B.

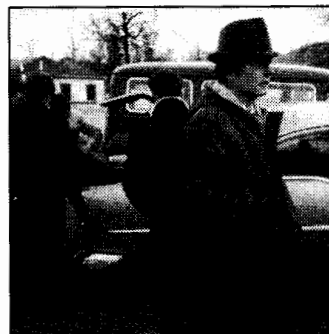
UT: What kind of audience reaction did the Answers get?

VE: Yeah, we got a great reaction.

UT: Can you tell us anything about the session that produced your most famous song, I'm talking of course about the awesome "It's Just A Fear"?

VE: We recorded "It's Just A Fear" at TPA studios in Denmark Street, London, one morning after a wild gig somewhere in the Midlands. I remember our van broke down and Taffy, who used to look after Donovan, towed us back down the A1 in his American Cadillac. It was the fastest our tranny [transit van] had ever gone. We even got stopped for speeding. I think there was some acid around at the same time! We went straight to the studio and knocked out "It's Just A Fear" and "Gotta Believe Me" on the B-side. Our manager took it over that afternoon to EMI and they took it. That's how easy it was in those days - no hanging about.

UT: On the second Columbia sin-



US Airforce Base, Orleans, France, 1963. The Answers load up the Chevy. Vince in foreground.

IT'S JUST A FEAR

WORDS AND MUSIC BY TONY HILL

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The Answers, ca. 1965. L to R: Ronnie ("We never knew his second name"), Vince Edwards, Bob Calder, Tony Hill.

gle, "That's What You're Doing To Me" b/w "Got A Letter From My Baby," the mood is somewhat more sombre and restrained than the thunderous "It's Just A Fear," with definite leanings towards soul.

VE: The influence then was Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions, which we had heard on the US bases, sweet soul.

UT: I have to ask you this, Vince. Why didn't the group go for another fiery beat offering as a follow up to the awesome "It's Just A Fear"?

VE: Tony called the shots on the songs, as he was writing. The rest of us were just having fun trying to survive.

UT: When did the Answers decide to call it a day, and did you all remain good friends after you went your separate ways?

VE: I remember thinking (back around the time of the Oxford show) that I would rather sing soul and put a band together, with a horn section etc, and this was the beginning of the end. We stayed mates but just drifted apart. Bob went to work as a roadie in late '66; then he worked for Robert Stigwood and as a soundman for the Bee Gees. Ronn went missing (found a lady of mercy, perhaps in Oxford?), and Tony did his own thing, including some gigs with David Bowie.

I think all our gear went missing from an office in Denmark Street, and our assistant road manager went to live in Majorca - strange that! We broke up a little later.

UT: Given that you were originally based in Newcastle-Upon-

Tyne, I have to ask you if you knew the guys in the Animals, and whether you hung out with them much, or even played any gigs with them, maybe at someplace like the famous Club A-Go-Go?

VE: It's good you ask about the Animals because when I was serving my time at Swanhunters shipyards on the Tyne as an apprentice fitter, I worked with Chas Chandler. In fact his band at the time, the Kontors, who later became the Alan Price Combo and then the Animals, took over our Thursday night gig at the Cellar club in South Shields. Chas always said if I hadn't fixed that gig for him he would never have turned pro and discovered Jimi Hendrix. You never know.

I met Chas a couple of months before he died when I went to visit him at his home on one of my trips back to the Northeast. He was another good guy, lots of fun. Another really good friend of mine was Dave Rowberry, who replaced Alan Price in the Animals. In fact later on, in about 1972 or so, I had a group together called Jackson & Jones with Dave. Alex Harvey was also involved there too. We had a single out on Polydor.

UT: After the Answers quit, you released a bunch of singles on United Artists, including "I Like It"/"Skip To Ma Loo" in 1966, "I Can't Turn Back Time" in 1967 and "Aquarius"/"Hair" a year later. By this time you were also playing the character of "Vince" in the hugely successful London stage event of *Hair*. Can you tell us how all this came about?

VE: When the Answers stopped, I played with my new band called Vince Edwards' Present Tense around the soul clubs in London for about six months. Then I joined a London band called the Gates of Eden, and sang all over England with them for about six months till they broke up - good fun, though I never recorded with them. Then I got the recording deal with United Artists. Bob Calder, our Answers bass player - then my lodger in Wimbledon - arrived back from the States with a demo of "Aquarius" from the workshop of the musical *Hair* that Robert Stigwood was involved in over in New York. He thought I might like it. It blew my mind! Next day I was playing it to the record company and about a month later I was recording it. Just then I read in the *New Musical Express* that there were auditions for *Hair* - London. I went to the Shaftesbury Theatre along with about 3,000 other hippies, including David Bowie, and sang "Aquarius" for the writers, and director Tom O'Horgan. (Thirty-two years later Tom directed the workshop of my musical *Souls* in New York.) I got the part of "Vince," playing myself, also recording on the original cast LP *Hair* on Polydor that I think was Number 2 in the English charts. It has just been released again

on CD here and in the US.

UT: Was Alex Harvey involved in *Hair* at the same time as you were?

VE: Alex Harvey was the lead guitar player in the *Hair* band and a very dear friend. I miss him a lot. We had lots of laughs back then.

UT: You have gone on to write many songs that have been successful for other artists on an international scale, for example "Right Back Where We Started From," which was a massive hit for the singer Maxine Nightingale, and more recently covered by Sinitta which resulted in another hit record. Do these songwriting successes allow you the freedom to do exactly what you want with your life, relatively speaking?

VE: Whether I had written "Right Back Where We Started From" or not I think I would be doing exactly the same - still waiting for tomorrow!

Love and peace, Vincent

My thanks to Vince for taking the time to answer all my questions, and for the friendly and lively correspondence via email, and telephone conversations. Cheers and all the best to you, Vince! — Lenny Helsing

Editor's Note: Lenny's band the Thanes covered "It's Just A Fear" for a single on Sundazed Records. Go get it!