

LOOKING BACK WITH JESS.

The *Real* **JESS CONRAD** talks to
Graham Hunter.

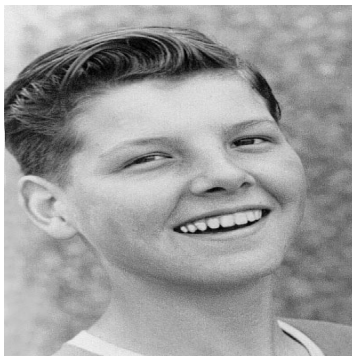
With the new film “**Telstar**” starring Kevin Spacey released on the cinema circuit on the 19th of June 2009 (On DVD September 21st 2009) and the first issue of his early sixties black

and white film “**Rag Doll**” being officially released by ODEON on DVD (ODME 149) in May of 2009, *Graham Hunter* talks with Sixties star **Jess Conrad** about his career on film, stage and being one of England’s early pop idols.

Jess is one of few original sixties artists out there today still treading the boards appearing in shows up and down the country and in Europe, he works effortlessly for various charities including the Showbiz XI Football Team and Variety Club and puts on his annual concert at Windsors Theatre Royal (Sixties Icons In Concert or Boy Meets Girl) where he invites sixties mates to appear.



Growing Up in London



Gerald Arthur James was a popular kid growing up on South East London’s streets, one of three brothers, dreaming one day that he’d be in the movies like his childhood heroes, James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson and Larry Parks. The young Gerald had ideals of being somebody someday and by the mid fifties he set out to achieve his goals, with a cockney wink and smile that by the post war fifties would become somewhat of a cocky bravado spurred on like so many young men of his day who were full of energy as Britain began to rebuild it’s society after the demise of Hitler.

Gerald became Jess after school friends who would nickname him ‘Jesse James’ like the renowned outlaw, the ‘Conrad’ would come later at the request of the media mogul *Jack Good.*

Leaving school back in the early fifties left few career choices other than building labouring or the armed forces. Jess initially worked in his father’s flower selling business spending a great deal of time at their pitch near London’s Marble Arch. With a desire to be a ‘movie star’ Jess got his Union card and joined the Film Artists Association (now defunct) and as far back as 1955 secured his first celluloid ‘blink and you’ll miss me’

appearance in the *Kenneth More* film “Reach For The Sky” playing a young squaddie also he appeared in the *Jose Ferrer/Trevor Howard* film “The Cockleshell Heroes”. “My Teenage Daughter” (1956) starring *Anna Neagle* and *Sylvia Syms* gave the 20-year old budding actor a chance to play a juvenile delinquent and “Further Up The Creek” (1958) with *David Tomlinson* and *Frankie Howerd* gave Jess an un-named small part. 1958 would be the start of the turning point in Jess’s career as he was earning well doing extra and bit parts in films but he next had to get himself some lines and hopefully secure a bigger role. When you next see an early *Norman Wisdom* film “Follow A Star” (1959) on tv some afternoon look out for the scene where he gets heckled whilst performing on stage by three juveniles, one of whom is the young Jess. By 1959 billed as ‘Jess Conrad’ he achieved his first film lead with the independent film “Rag Doll” (In which Jess sings “Why Am I Living?” backed by the then unknown *Dave Clark Five!* (Released in the USA as “Young, Willing And Eager”) he was the star of this low budget British made film, most of which he spent in the same leather jacket! Jess featured as a ‘bad boy’ delinquent with robbery on his mind. This one turns up on Channel 5 late at night on occasion and is often referred to as having ‘cult status’ as the character narrowly mirrored a Brando-esque approach.

British record companies were constantly on the look out for the new ‘Elvis’, *Cliff Richard* (Jess also appeared in Cliff’s 1958 film ‘Serious Charge’) already had his niche with EMI

(Columbia) as did *Adam Faith* on Parlophone. Decca had *Billy Fury* notching up significant sales and Phillips (Fontana) was scoring well with *Marty Wilde* and *Eden Kane*.



The British Rock ‘n’ Roll Rat Pack

were soon to get a new member as Jess was signed to Decca Records and recorded his first single “Cherry Pie” (Decca 11236) a cover of Skip & Flips American hit from 1959. But wait a minute.....let’s roll back and see what events led to this, who was the mastermind behind the rise of the young Gerald James and the British pop ‘legend’ that has become **JESS CONRAD**.

ENTER JESS, EXIT GERALD.....

Where did you get your stage name because your real name is Gerald, that doesn’t have a pop star ring to it?

“My mates at school called me ‘Jesse’ after the Wild West outlaw and my real surname is James so Jesse James I was nicknamed. Then when I went to train in drama at the Actors Workshop in London with people like *Shirley Anne Field* and *Harry H. Corbett* where we were taught the *James Dean*, Brando style of method acting, ala Stanislavski Method.

There was already an actor in the union Equity with the name Gerald James so I had to

find another name, so I used Jess and my drama teacher thought I conjured up a vision of adventure and as he was a fan of the famous adventure writer Joseph Conrad he suggested 'Conrad' as a surname"

"I remember well the day my name was decided upon, everyone in the class cheered and carried me around the room, in the days of the Rank studios and matinee idols if you were an actor you had to have a 'marquee name', like *Tab Hunter* or *Rock Hudson*, *Dirk Bogart* and so on. You couldn't have had a name in those days like Arnold Schwarzenegger!"

What were your early years like as a teenager growing up in South London and then becoming a 'teen idol'?

"There were no teenagers before us, you simply left school and became an apprentice and then you became a man which meant you wore a tie and a hat and went to work, you had a wife at home, the start of a young family and the contents of your home were more than likely on HP.

"We very much copied the Americans in everything, there were no rock and roll stars here in the UK until *Bill Haley* and Elvis came along and Tommy (Steele), Cliff (Richard) and Marty (Wilde) and their managers then had the moulds from which to base themselves, with those and others finally teenagers in this country finally had a voice. You have to remember this was England before it became Technicolor!"

"When for instance I won what was the equivalent of the X Factor in 1960, a TV show called **WHAM!** I was voted '**Most Popular Singer**' and couldn't go down the street without being recognised. I woke up everyday with my mums house surrounded by teenage fans, but the infringement on my mothers way of life became quite alot to bear, she loved me being famous but she couldn't understand the adulation.

Wham! was a show for teenagers, there weren't as many television channels then so if you were a teenager and wanted to watch the latest stars and hear the latest music on your TV then shows like **WHAM!**, **BOY MEETS GIRL** and **6.5 SPECIAL** were on offer, with a more family orientated show on Sundays like "Sunday Night At The London Palladium" When those shows were on back then the streets would be empty, all the teenagers would be watching those.

"The whole promotion machine was working back then with the artists and record companies and the discovery that television was and remains one of the most popular mediums to promote anything. Cliff, Marty, Billy and Adam, Eden, *Joe Brown*, *Helen Shapiro*, *Kathy Kirby* and I were the first British pop stars long before the Beatles and the group era"

"What kind of songs were you performing on WHAM! "

"The first song I ever did on television was a duet with **Billy Fury** called "Chic-A-Chic-A-Honey" (April 1960), my mother recorded the TV show on a reel to reel tape machine but I don't know where that tape has gone. One day it will re-appear I am sure, I'd love to hear it, a big rarity for Billy's fans too"

"I also did **Freddy Cannon's** "The Urge", a lot of **Ricky Nelson** type numbers which suited me like "It's Late", **Fabian's** "Turn



Me Loose”, the **(Bobby) Rydell** material, all songs that fitted in with the image that **Jack Good** was trying to create for me, the kind of Boy-Next-Door, walking through a corn field drinking a glass of milk. There are some pictures of me from that show dressed in a white suit, it was that squeaky-clean image as apposed to say Gene Vincent’s rock and roll image of a black leather clad more evil look. Some of the numbers had a slight country tinge to them, as Ricky Nelson’s did”

"I toured many times with Gene (Vincent), when I was on the girls screamed and the boys booed, when Gene was on the girls booed and the boys screamed; well they didn't scream I suppose they cheered!"

“What do you recall of your first TV appearances, we are talking early 1960 (April) just prior to your first record coming out, where did you make WHAM! for instance?”



“I did a whole season on WHAM! And Decca signed me to a recording contract; I made several singles for them (9 between 1960-63) the hits being “Cherry Pie”,,” Mystery Girl” ,”Pretty Jenny” and the cult “This Pullover”, viewers would have seen it in black and white, it was raw but it was what the teenagers wanted and it paved the way for what was to come as many of us pop stars became ‘all round entertainers’ and filtered in to variety and acting, like Adam (Faith) did. We were the new breed I suppose; I of course was more used to acting, i’d been in rep for two years before my pop star days. you had your Albert Finney’s, Tom Courtenay’s and Diana Dors’ type of actors and along came the young pop star fellas some of whom proved quite natural on camera like Marty (Wilde) Adam (Faith)and Cliff and made some good pop films and took to the camera well.

The programme was made in Manchester at Didsbury Studios, in the days before the M1, it would take almost a day to get there from London, and I think it does now with the roads as they are today! (Laughs!) I use to drive up there with *Keith Fordyce* the shows compere. I can remember the budget on the show wasn’t that big, rehearsals weren’t long; I was learning new songs each week of the run of the show. Billy Fury was on the first one with me as I mentioned, Joe Brown, the Vernon Girls, Marty did it, and he’d already done “6.5 Special” and “Boy Meets Girl” for Jack Good. After that finished, and remember it was before Top Of The Pops, there was “Thank Your Lucky Stars” and Keith (Fordyce) went on to do “Ready Steady Go!”

Didn't you go on to "Thank Your Lucky Stars"?

"Yes I did do the show, it was for ATV, the first one I did was actually the second episode, they only ran for about thirty minutes until it became more popular and they would add American guests and it would run for almost an hour. All the big stars of the day performed on it, I was on with **Dickie Valentine**, a young **Benny Hill** and an American singer **Ivory Joe Hunter**. My dear friend **Bert Weedon** was on one with me, we also had the **Vernon Girls** on the programme. I remember doing one episode with a young Oliver Reed who really wanted to become a pop star but when things didn't work out for him his career as we know took another direction. The budget was bigger and it was made at Alpha Television Studios in Aston, near Birmingham. I went back there in the seventies when I did "Crossroads"(Character Philip Bailey) I think the studios have gone now - lots of memories there, the whole scene was fresh and exciting, pop stars were pop stars and they lasted more than six months if they were lucky, there were lots of shows to work on in those days, sadly, hardly any were ever kept on film or just went out live so nothing was filmed" (Note: There are only 3 Thank Your Lucky Stars programmes remaining in a vault in Australia according to my source Kevin Mulrennan)

THE BRITISH ROCK 'N' ROLL RAT PACK

"There is of course and thankfully the famous black and white photograph of you along with Marty, Adam, Joe, Billy, Eddie Cochran and Gene Vincent, what a picture!"

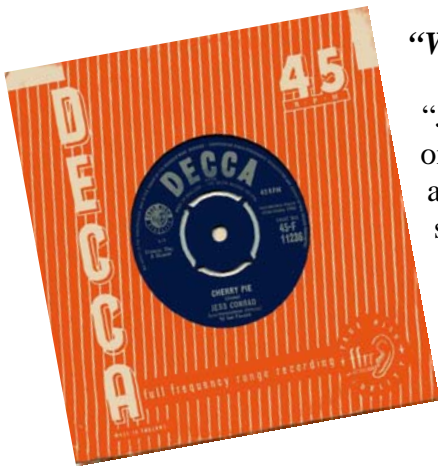
"That was taken on the set of the **WHAM!** Show in Manchester. I suppose the Americans aside (Eddie and Gene) myself and the other guys were the British Rock 'n'



Roll Rat Pack, such a wonderful time to be around in British popular music then. There were lots of artists who wanted 'in' as it were but they couldn't get 'in', Jack (Good) wouldn't have it, he had his favourites. Jack was and still is an incredible man, such vision, he really kicked the British television companies in to touch with what America was doing at the time and if it

hadn't been for Jack many of us 60's pop stars wouldn't have made it, it was the actor in him that he would pour into us. He would try to create a style and character, look at how he moulded Cliff in to the smouldering rock 'n' roll singer on OH BOY!, a bit of Elvis, some James Dean . He would rehearse a number and have me look at different cameras for different lines of the song. If you missed a cue he wouldn't look at you, Jack was a

drill master. Jack knew what he wanted to create, you didn't fear him as long as you always gave a 100% performance, I would always rehearse hard in my dressing room. It was obvious on the set that even though we were dressed in coloured clothes to suit the image created for us even though TV was shown back then in black and white. We had a choreographer and everything was run in a military-like way, Jack was really quite extraordinary for what he was doing, a man before his time”



“Who signed you to Decca back in 1960?”

“Jack Good was very instrumental in that, he even played on one of my records, “This Pullover”, it’s him tapping away at a match box in the beginning along with the string section. I was being ‘created’ by Jack and I suppose along similar lines to Americas Fabian, the parallel being that we were both good looking young guys but didn't necessarily have the greatest singing voices, but had great appeal and draw to teenage girls of the time. We were moulded as the boy bands are today”

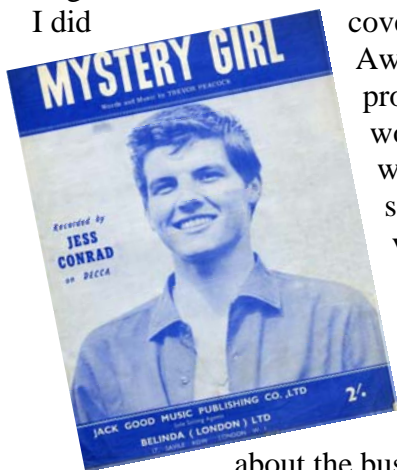
“How much choice did you have in your material with Decca?”

“None really. I can remember in those days you didn’t have demos on CD or tape, there’d be a meeting at Decca in London along the Albert Embankment and someone would play the tunes on a grand piano in an office overlooking the river Thames.

What I didn’t know then though was that the ‘Sheik of Shake’ Dickie Pride was going to cover the high notes on my recordings, so they’d have to make sure he was available before they rang me!

Dickie was a good singer and probably the first British pop singer to sadly die from a drug overdose.”

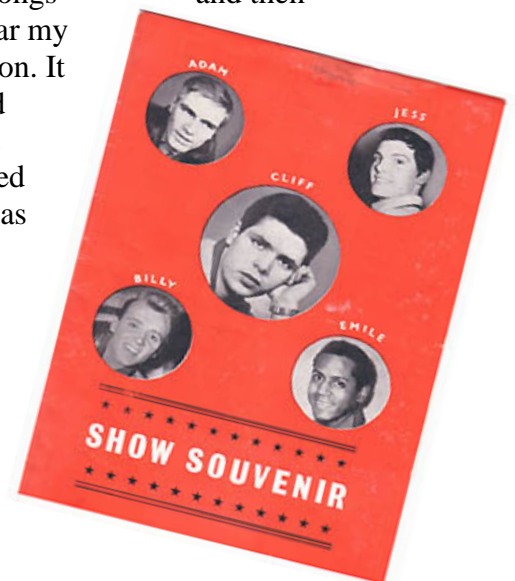
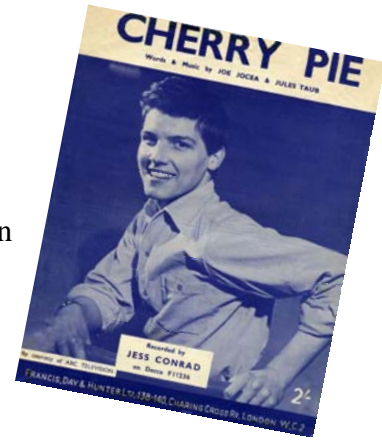
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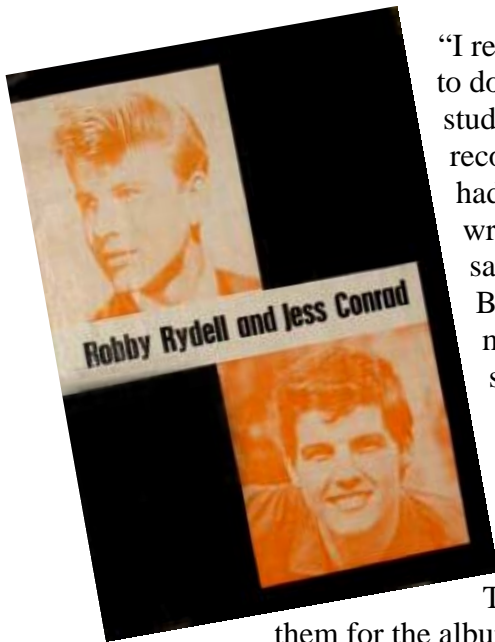
cover some **Gene Pitney** songs like “(I Wanna) Love My Life Away” and “Every Breath I take” which was probably a bit progressive for Jess!” (Laughs). It was quite funny really, I would cover Gene Pitney songs and someone in South Africa would cover me singing Gene’s songs and then

someone in Malta would then hear my versions and cover those and so on. It would have been good if I could have chosen the songs I did but really and truly it was all handed to me to learn then record, I was a Pop Idol who knew nothing

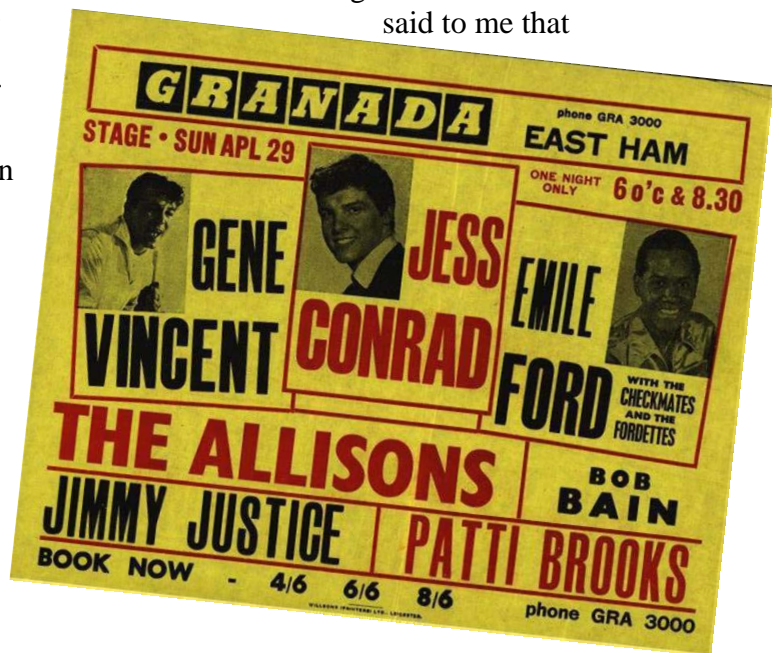
about the business side of things and I went with other people’s judgement on material, the producers, arrangers and such. I was just happy to do as I was told and to be a pop star, who wouldn’t have!”



“But were you happy with the songs you got to wax to vinyl?”



“I recorded anything, I hadn’t sung before so I didn’t know what to do, I was so delighted to be out of Brixton and in a recording studio, I just went along with the flow, I was so naïve that when I recorded “This Pullover” I thought that William Shakespeare had written it, Jack who produced it wrote out the words and wrote Shakespeare’s name at the bottom. I remember Jack saying “This kid will sing anything and the kids will buy it” Back then the lyrics didn’t sound so trite. It was a popular melody in Italy with an English lyric. It wasn’t such a silly song when you look back as other artists had songs out about Blue Suede Shoes and Pillows to cry on, “This Pullover” was another one in the sentimental batch that today has cult status, Kenny Everett certainly saw to that back in the eighties when I had four of my recordings on his “Worlds Worst Records Album” for K-Tel.” Decca wouldn’t let K-Tel use the masters so I went in the studio and re-recorded them for the album which came out on green vinyl and is now a highly sought after album for collectors of kitsch, it's kitsch of the kitchest! It was a bit of a comeback for me, Kenny Everett kept mentioning me on the radio (Capital Radio, London) My management insisted on a substantial fee for me to re-record the songs and added to the fact the album charted my bank manager Kenny Everett must be either my worst enemy or best friend, but as I look out of my office at the swimming pool Kenny bought for me I realise he must have been my best friend!”



JESS IS RE-MASTERED AND RE-ISSUED

“In 2006 your Decca recordings finally did see the light of day in a re-mastered form.....”



“Yes my Decca recordings came out on a CD , re-mastered, I am pleased with the way the CD was produced though I knew nothing about it until it was released, I didn’t have any input with that project but it was good to see some of the tracks out there again, especially some of the good rockers I did for the ATV drama with Herbert Lom “The Human Jungle” (Episode; The Flip Side Man), that was Rhet Stoller and his band on those, a great musician, he and his band came on tour with me. The songs I performed in “The Human Jungle” were

top class for that era; they were good rock-come pop songs. Some will have special interest for their time like "Twist My Wrist" which was really the first Twist record out in the UK, it was featured in a film I made called "KIL 1", and not a lot of people will realise that I bought the Twist to the UK before Chubby Checker. There was a big advert out on the cinema screens back then that I did for Bri-Nylon, I haven’t seen the advert since, love to find it, I sang the title song for that one "Hey Little Girl". "As You Like It" was originally an A-sided single for me, Adam Faith had that hit."

At least now that highly collectable album you made for Decca that fetches a fair price these days is available along with some of the rare EP cuts.....

“And I am proud to say has had some good and amusing write-ups, it seems it has a ‘cheesy-lounge following’ according to one review, whatever that means! Producer Bill Kenwright told me that HMV record shop in Oxford Street (London) had dedicated a whole window display for the CD”



“In 1961 you were voted Top Pop Singer’ in an NME Poll yet despite your popularity, you were not having big hit records, why did you think that was?”

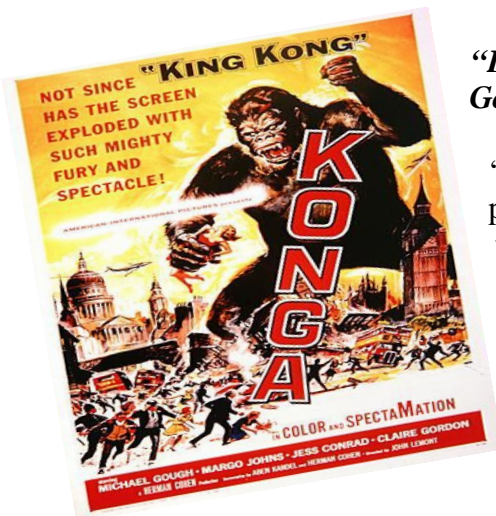
“It's like winning the lottery; we just couldn't get *the* hit. With a number one hit record back then i'd have been a superstar today but that's how it goes, it seems ironic because at one time I was voted England's most popular singer in that NME Poll, and was one of the biggest ‘Teen Idols’ call it what you like, in the country and yes you are right I didn't score the hits my then status should have possibly commanded, it was strange all the powers that be couldn't get a number one hit with me, but that was a stroke of luck. I had promoters booking me all the time for tours, on my website there's a ticket stub from a tour I did with Matt Monro as my supporting act!(www.jessconrad.com) I also had Gene Vincent opening one of my tours too; I still have the poster for that one. I was touring with people that are now legendary, like **Gene (Vincent)** and **Matt Monro, Brenda Lee** and on TV with people like **Eddie Cochran, Adam Faith, Billy Fury, Marty, Joe, Cliff** and so many others.

The records I made weren't the best but mine weren't the only ones, it is possible my recording career needed more guidance. Looking back I probably did need stronger material; I feel my Columbia recordings were better songs with nice full production, like “Take Your Time” and the Mitch Murray song “Things I'd Like To Say” which is from the film I made “The Golden Head” (the first ‘Cinerama’ film) I had some good arrangers like **Charles Blackwell, Johnny Keating** and song writer **Les Reed**. For me the recording thing came along and opened doors, WHAM! and BOY MEETS GIRL gave me breaks and made me a Pop Star but it was as an actor playing a Pop Star that I began my pop career”

“In most of the early films you made you had a song or two didn't you, like in “Rag Doll” (British Lion Films) (Song: “Why Am I Living?”), any others?”

“I did “Oh Susannah” in” The Queen's Guards” (Directed by Michael Powell) a film with Raymond Massey and his son Daniel. I sang “Twist The Stars” which I wrote with famous Greek composer Manos Hatzidakis for a film called “Aliki”(Finos Films also known as "Aliki My Love") (1963) (Due out on DVD soon in Greece) starring Aliki Vouyouklaki who was then Greece's biggest star and Wilfred Hyde-White. I had the great fortune to sing in an Arthur Askey film “Friends And Neighbours”, infact most films I starred in I sang in, I suppose it was to cash in on my pop star following.....”

THE FILMS



“Like the cult gorilla epic “Konga” (1961) with Michael Gough?”

“I did a song in that but it was cut from the movie, it's probably sitting in a film can on some shelf, the song was “This Pullover”, the film is out on DVD and it would be nice if they had included it as a bonus feature, the outtakes must be stored somewhere”

“Stars of the day like Billy Fury and Cliff Richard made those pop style films, did you get offered those?”

JC “Yes I did, at the time I was with the Al Parker agency and my agent would get all sorts of offers but I wanted to do more of the straight acting roles, something in me said “I am an actor and I won’t do the pop films” in retrospect I should have done them. But all of that was in the days when I was a young actor and then a pop star and long before I had the Jess Conrad persona of sending myself up.

I turned down “Curse of the Werewolf” (1961) and the part went to Oliver Reed who became one of England’s finest actors. I was doing a television play in Birmingham at the time (The Runable Stag), the closest I got to doing a pop film is “The Boys” even though I didn’t sing in it, the Shadows did the music and like “Konga” and “Rag Doll” it shows up late on Channel 5 television these days and is a cult movie. Sidney Furie was the director who later went on to direct Marlon Brando in “One Eyed Jacks” amongst others. The Boys was shot on hand held cameras on real locations around London, made in black and white. One day it will probably come out as an official DVD”



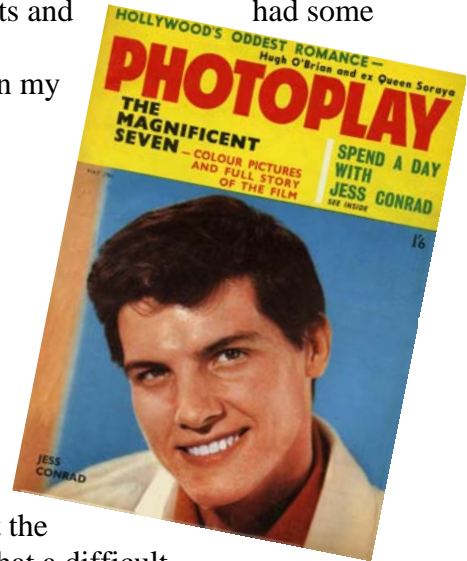
“What was your first acting role on TV?”



“That would have to be **"Rock-A-Bye-Barney"** produced by Daphne Shadwell (Stars & Garters, Sooty Show, Ready Steady Go! Director/Producer) she saw me in an advert I did for the **Daily Sketch** newspaper and said “That’s the boy I want!” they were looking for an unknown to play the lead so I played a young pop star in that TV drama. At the time of making this play I was an unknown actor and the producers brought **Gary Mills** who was then a pop star (who's big hit was "Look For A Star") in to dub my voice in a song I sang at the end of the show at the London Palladium as a pop star the character I played in the play, ironically some months later I became England's most popular singer, funny old business isn't it! I don't know if it exists on film at all, would love to see it”

.....And you once appeared on the front cover of Photoplay magazine and went to America; did you have your sights set on a Hollywood career in films or as a pop star there or both?

"It was a great accolade to be on the front cover of **Photoplay** as they only used people like Rock Hudson, Paul Newman and Tony Curtis etc. so what a thrill they used England's Jess Conrad. I went there in 1962 to promote my film "Konga" in tandem with my record "Mystery Girl" which was in the English charts and had some appointments to see some people in the business, I was advised to stay in America for six months so I could gain my Green Card and audition for various movies but I was so heavily committed back in England, with other film and concert commitments In retrospect I would have liked to have stayed there but with my thriving career back in England and as I was newly married to my wife Renee, there was too much going on in the UK to take the gamble of starting again in the USA. It was possibly a bad mistake not to have stayed in Hollywood and try for a career there. Some British artists like John Leyton did try their luck with the Hollywood machine with some success, as for me I continued to make films in Europe and work doing plays and musicals as well as concerts at the London Palladium and Wembley Pool, so you can see what a difficult decision it was to take the gamble in America with everything I was contracted to do in England."



"So to reflect on your film career which has really come full circle with your recent appearance in the new film "Telstar"(Aspiration Films, Released June 2009) (Playing British music svengali Larry Parnes) with Nigel Harman (from Eastenders) playing the 'young' Jess Conrad you sort of fell in to that European film genre of the sixties where many British stars would film in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and Greece"

"Certainly, with some stars like **Shirley Anne Field, George Sanders, Buddy Hackett** and **Anthony Steele** and others. A lot of people who come to see my shows today think of me as a sixties pop star but I did at one time have an international film career and still do make films from time to time and I've always seen myself as primarily an actor"



"Telstar-The Movie" (Aspiration Films) now on general release and on DVD directed by actor/director Nick Moran and made at Twickenham Studios and stars Kevin Spacey, Pam Ferris, Ralph Little, Rita Tushingham and some guest cameo appearances."

"I can't believe that I am in a film where somebody else is playing me and not only that I am playing the mogul Larry Parnes who managed Tommy Steele, Joe Brown, Billy Fury, Marty Wilde and so forth. Nigel Harman who played Dirty Dens son in Eastenders is an uncanny Jess Conrad look-a-like, his Spotlight picture next to my black and white pop star picture they sold in Woolworths during the sixties are identical. Nick Moran the director phoned me personally to ask me to play Larry. It was a great experience making the movie and there was a wonderful atmosphere on the set. I think of all the things I have contributed to, this really has all the makings of a hit"

FINDING THE FILMS

“So where are all those films today?”

“Like “KIL 1” (1962) which we found a print for but no soundtrack. In that one I sang “Twist My Wrist”, one of the very first British Twist records (Decca). “Friends And Neighbours” with Arthur Askey can’t be found; neither can “The Queens Guards” “The Boys” still gets shown on television, “Konga” is often shown and has a big cult following, there are T-shirts sold in London with “Konga” on it, “Aliko” has been found and shows on the continent and bits on the internet on You Tube”

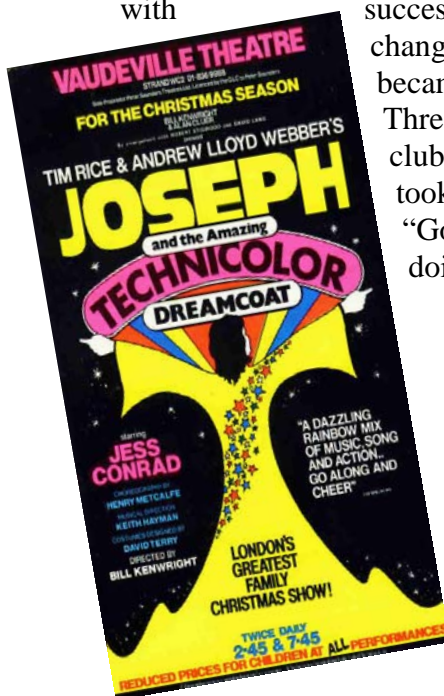
“But “The Golden Head” has been located and was screened in 2007 at the Bradford Film Festival”

“I didn’t know that, I’d love to have seen it, only ever saw it at the screening when it opened originally back in the sixties. “The Golden Head” was the first Cinerama film shot with a single lens, in other words you didn’t see the cracks in the editing on screen which was quite evident in other Cinerama films. I have made many films, for those interested you can see the list of them on my website (www.jessconrad.com) and hopefully I’ll be able to get copies of those films for my own collection one day. If any readers ever locate them they can always email me via the website”

“Getting back to the music scene of the sixties, by 1964 there were changes with the onslaught of the Beat Group era when a lot of solo artists found their solo recording careers floundering. How did you feel the changes?”

“We (recording artists) used to go to clubs and venues to promote our records. I can remember being at one of the promotional events with Billy Fury and Marty Wilde and The Beatles came in to push their record, I think it was Marty who turned to me and said “They’re not very Elvis are they!” They looked like the Three Stooges with their funny short jackets and mop haircuts, they looked more comical, certainly not rock and roll but we had heard about them and witnessed the hysteria from the crowd that day and I think we all realised that is was back to the drawing board for us and that our era was finished. You had to be part of a band by then with a new style and most of the bands emerging with

success then were from Liverpool and Manchester. It was a big change for everyone, we went on to the club circuit, Shane Fenton became and act with his wife Shane & Iris, Marty formed the Wylde Three with his wife and Justin Hayward (Moody Blues). I did the clubs for a little while but felt I should go back in to acting which took me from straight roles in plays and led me in to musicals like “Godspell” and “Joseph & His Technicolor Dreamcoat”. I’d been doing panto since the dawn of time as well! (Laughs)



GH *“And then in the early seventies the whole sixties revival thing started which continues to this day (2007)”*

“Yes it’s all come back round again, Shane (Fenton) became Alvin Stardust and had some hits again, Marty had been Zappo for a while and Joe (Brown) worked with his family as Brown’s Home Brew, but we were all able to play the big festivals and it continues today with the Butlin’s Sixties weekends and Warners and sixties cruises, I played the London Palladium recently with Marty and Eden Kane and John Leyton which was a wonderful night, reminded me of the package tours we used to do together”

RARE AND COLLECTABLE RECORDINGS & JOE MEEK



“Let’s look at some of those later recordings you made after Decca and Columbia, there were some good songs on President Records but none of them charted, I’m talking about “The Other Side Of Life”, “Crystal Ball Dream” and “Here She Comes Again”, all very different and today quite collectable on auction sites like Ebay and Gemm.”

”I made those records, produced and leased them to President Records. No big orchestrations on them, Cy Payne arranged one, my friend the late Ivor Raymonde did “Here She Comes Again” which he co-wrote, they were just nice records. After that I made “Save It For A Rainy Day” for EMI which I’m quite proud of, with its Buddy Holly feel. That was with Junior Campbell, vocal backings by Dave Dee and Troy Dante”

Who are ‘MEN’?

“I made a record with **Dave Dee**, **Junior Campbell** (Marmalade) and **Troy Dante** (The Infernos) under the name of MEN, it was recorded at Denham Studios in Buckinghamshire, and we did “These Are Not My People” the Joe South song and Chris Andrews’ “Yesterday Man” (Antic Records 1974). Dave Dee who was a great mate of mine produced it and put it out on his label. It wasn’t a hit for us and you have probably never seen a copy!” (GH: Sadly I have!) Dave was a funny man, kind and fun to be around, he’ll be sadly missed by all of us who knew him”.

“ There’s an extremely rare record you made in 1966 that only came out in South Africa on Pye Records there, what’s the story on that one?”

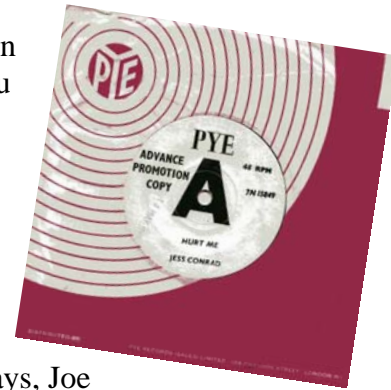
“I was touring in South Africa with **Kathy Kirby**, we did some television there (I wonder if any of that was ever kept?) and the record company were desperate to get a record out on me there so I wrote a song called “Tin Pan Alley Rag” and it was put out with “Little Bit Of Loveliness”. Not a good recording, the whole thing sounds quite raw today but it was of it’s time, I don’t even have the guts to play it myself today! (Laughs) There must be copies of it in South Africa. I was popular there and could have stayed and worked but

chose not to, it was in the days before apartheid”

“Going back to 1966 you made a record for Joe Meek which came out on Pye Records and from time to time turns up on CD compilations of anything Meek related, the song “Hurt Me”, what can you tell me about your experiences with Joe Meek?”

“It’s so unique that one, so unlike Joe Meek’s previous recordings, who knows what was in his mind when he made it, anyone who thought “This Pullover” was a bad record should hear “Hurt Me”! I seem to remember the B-side wasn’t a great song either but is well known for guitarist **Richie Blackmore** playing on it. One interesting thing about that record is the female spoken voice on it, nobody knows who it is, but I can reveal to you and Meek collectors it is a (then) young model called Pat Booth who became quite a famous novelist in America years later.

I was going to work again with Joe, he had some ideas to try, I was out of the UK quite a lot by then making films and agreed we’d get together and try some other songs but sadly he committed suicide a year later so that never happened. The whole thing with Joe was like my Decca days, Joe played me the song and I agreed to do it, he had quite a reputation in his studio, I didn’t see the crazy side of him many have spoken about though there are other stories I’ll save for another chapter”



THE NEXT 50 YEARS!

“How do you feel when people jibe you about your singing and some of those records that Kenny Everett selected as the World’s Worst?”

“Well to answer that one I can only say that I never set out to be Pavarotti. When I look back at the score for Andrew Lloyd Webber’s “Joseph” musical it’s not the easiest to sing and I toured in that for eight years, bringing it to the West End twice. I know where I am as a singer so no-one can press any buttons to upset me. All I say to those who try to get to me about my singing is “don’t mix up the pay cheques!”

“Do you not wish you’d been more selective about what you did back then?”

“I was never discourteous about making records, or films come to that, if someone handed me the material I was just happy to be there. Most of my working life I’ve done pretty much everything that’s ever been put in the table for me. It’s the business I observed and admired when I was growing up, sneaking in to the London Palladium, yet never dreaming that one day I would appear on that stage myself. I worked with so many wonderfully talented people in their own fields and quite diverse when I look back, from top film directors to record producers, some great songwriters and producers, many of whom I have told you about in this interview”

“How do you see the future? I mean 2009 is your 50th year in the biz as Jess Conrad. With what I have learned about you I can't see you ever retiring!”

“I am a workaholic to this day, always on the go doing something, performing, raising money for charities with the **Showbiz XI** football team (Jess played in goal for the various celebrity line-ups since 1959 until 2006 and is now the Showbiz XI manager) over the years we had so many interesting stars playing like **Anthony Newley, Sean Connery, Kenny Lynch, Rod Stewart, Rick Wakeman, Robbie Williams, Dave Dee, Malcolm Roberts, Tommy Steele, Bernard Bresslaw, Alfie Bass, Mike and Bernie Winters**, the list goes on, we've raised millions over the years for worthwhile charities and to this day I continue to support the Showbiz XI and the various celebrity golf tournaments, but I am still driven by the only game I know, which is show business, I can't put it any simpler than that.”



“I would like to do some more acting; I just recently finished the Ben Travers play “The Bed Before Yesterday” with Susan Penhaligon at the Mill Theatre, Sonning which I thoroughly enjoyed”



“I continue to work on stage in concerts and cabaret and play my annual fifties and sixties show at the Theatre Royal in Windsor each year (November), John Leyton, Craig Douglas, Mike Berry, Jet Harris, Billie Davis, Kenny Lynch, The Vernon Girls and Chip Hawkes all play the show with me, it's fun and it's nostalgia.

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“You have to remember I was a young man who got in to films then became a pop star



because someone (Jack Good) said I looked like one, it was a natural thing to make records and I went with the flow, I learned my craft with the job and in this business you learn every day as each event in your daily life is different. My concerts and cabaret performances are better today than they have ever been, I have learned so much. It's wonderful to still be doing it all after almost fifty years as Jess Conrad and I look forward to the next fifty!”

Jess at the London Palladium

Note to readers.

*Jess would like to hear from anyone who knows where he can locate copies of some of his films and the television **Bri-Nylon** advert from 1962 that featured his song “Hey Little Girl”.*

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The DVD of “**Rag Doll**” (ODME 149) is available at www.odeonent.co.uk

Jess Conrad’s website is: www.jessconrad.com

Check out Jess’s website to see his memorabilia SHOP.

