

# The Lost Album

Most readers will be very familiar with the Billy Fury success story and in particular his years on the Decca label from 1958-66, but it is worthwhile recounting some of his achievements.

His chart hits (26 hit singles out of 29 releases in that period) spanned early 1959 to the end of 1966 and were joined by two hit EPs and four hit albums. When adding in his three hits for Polydor, including the beautiful *Forget Him* with its updated backing, and two additional hit albums from that later period, he spent a total of 322 weeks on the charts between 1959 and 1983.

All of this occurred without attaining the coveted number one slot in the UK singles chart, but he was for three years the NME's Most Requested Artist for Poll Concert (live performer), due to his unique and amazingly charismatic stage performances, and was also voted Britain's No 2 Male Artist, again for three years.

Despite this, his most significant artistic achievement is widely regarded as being the acclaimed self-penned *Sound of Fury* album, re-issued several times and still selling today.

It is a testament to Billy's continued popularity that a CD and a DVD, both entitled *His Wondrous Story*, made the Top Ten in their respective charts in 2007-8.

Billy Fury has done rather well for a Dingle lad, born Ronald Wycherley on 17th April 1940 in Liverpool and suffering from a debilitating and ultimately life-threatening illness.

The story of Billy's switch to Parlophone at the end of 1966 and his life during that chart barren period is documented in the companion album to this one, *The Complete Parlophone Singles* (PEA009), also published by Peaksoft. This booklet complements that story.

During 1967 Billy was reported to be recording his first new album for three years, but none surfaced during his career with EMI.

This was presumably because while some singles sold quite well, they did not reach the charts.

As there are no session records currently available for the whole of the contract period, the only recordings that can be identified with a reasonable degree of certainty as being laid down in a given year are those released and those on either dated acetates, or on acetates shared with known releases.

Even then, it cannot be guaranteed that a track released in 1969 was recorded then; it could well have been cut earlier.

The only way that recordings can be established to belong to a certain session or year is either by recollections of those musicians or producers involved, or by other musicians identifying the musical signatures of the recordings.

Regrettably, to date, none of the musicians and artists contacted has yet responded to requests to share their knowledge.

The composition of *The Lost Album* is therefore at this stage an educated assumption based on available evidence, with many of the 12 tracks forming the album believed to be from 1970 to November 1971, when the EMI contract expired, and some earlier.

Many of the bonus tracks, believed to have been recorded at Abbey Road studios in the late 60s, could well also form the nucleus of a "lost album" of earlier tracks — the one referred to in the music press in 1967.

The numbers actually selected were picked because around half of them are self-evidently from the same session, some being unfinished but still good enough for release, especially as they represent a historical record of Billy's attempts to diversify, and perhaps find himself a niche in a musical world that had begun to pass him by.

A comment by a reviewer of Billy's 1974 Warner Brothers release *I'll Be Your Sweetheart* sums up the situation with Billy from 1967 to 1977 and retirement: "Billy is always re-arranging himself vocally."

Certainly, when listening to the whole 1967-74 output, the diversity is amazing and displays a remarkable ability on Billy's part.

Regrettably however, as ace UK rock 'n' roll DJ Geoff Barker laments, why didn't someone get Billy into a studio with a really tight rock 'n' roll band and a good producer, to create hard driving rock and blues masterpieces, instead of all of the pop diversity?

Tracks such as *My Baby Left Me*, a wonderful rock/blues hybrid with a great band, The Gamblers, (included on this album) highlights the lost opportunity.

In fairness to Billy, major solo artists of worldwide fame also struggled to establish hits or identity for many years during the late 60s.

On stage at least Billy was still able to be "Fury", which satisfied the fan base who still turned out to watch him perform, even if his occasional TV appearances to promote the eclectic mix of singles showed a whole new look Billy.

He had started cabaret, surely the death knell of the pop chart artist, in March 1966 and that was to continue, with rock 'n' roll tours and shows, right through until his second heart operation in 1976 and retirement in 1977.

His first operation in December 1971 rendered him unfit to tour as contracted in February 1972.

Soon after he was on the road again; there was no lack of courage and certainly there must have been a lot of steel in his core for him to endure the debilitating heart condition and operations as he did: Billy kept on going after two major operations and many visits "going in for a service" as he once said.

While ongoing attempts to locate the master tapes have been so far unsuccessful, the best possible sound has been achieved from the second-generation tapes from which most tracks on this album originated — a private collection assembled in the 1982-98 period.

The tracks picked to supplement the half dozen or so from the one session, seem to meld in well and it is hoped that the fans will enjoy the concept, flawed though perhaps it may be to a musician's ear.

Many years ago, EMI told me they had no records of any session details.

Perhaps records are being held by someone who will eventually come forward and maybe there would have been records retained if the contracted chart artist, "Mr Consistency" (as Billy was known in his heyday at Decca) had delivered the hits that were anticipated.

With agreement from Larry Parnes on 16th August 1982, all matrixes (recordings) were returned to the artist in 1982 and rights now reside with the Billy Fury Estate, which has given permission for the production of this album, to benefit the Billy Fury Memorial Fund.

Billy was contracted from the 21st December 1966 to record a minimum of nine recordings per year for the five years and there is reference to the rates to be paid for "33½ rpm records, one side of which shall feature six sections."

Albums were certainly initially anticipated. Billy's royalty was to be 3d per record (album) where he was the sole performer on both sides.

For singles where he was the sole per-

former on both sides he was to receive "one halfpenny."

The contract was signed by Larry Parnes, Ronald Wycherley and apparently for The Gramophone Company Ltd (trading as EMI), Thomas Humphrey Tilling.

Listed as being present were Alan Seifort and Peter Jones but the photo in the music press cited Rex Oldfield, General Manager of the Licences Repertoire Division of EMI.

The picture of Larry Parnes does not look like him either.

*The Lost Album* opens with a track obviously liked by Billy and a staple of his live act right up until 1982, *Unchain My Heart*.

Ray Charles was one of Billy's early 60s influences and Billy handles all versions really well — in fact, all of his Ray Charles covers are superlative.

The cover of the Temptations' 1966 track *Get Ready* is Billy's only known stab at the soul genre.

The Elvis influence was major and *That's All Right Mama* was another track performed live by Billy right up until 1982.

Little is known about the unremarkable *It's No Good* but *That's Right, That's Me* (also known as *Judas Iscariot*) and *Green Eyed American Actress* were written by Jimmy Campbell and featured on his *Half Baked* album of 1970.

This would seem to indicate that these tracks were laid down by Billy in that 1970-1 period at the earliest.

*Getting Sentimental*, which Billy's friend and manager Hal Carter liked, is an oddity; it sounds like an old standard but was apparently another Jimmy Campbell song.

The country classic *Wedding Bells* could have come from any time in the Parlophone period and was yet another favourite of Billy's from at least 1962 and the Radio Luxembourg *Sound of Fury* sessions. Billy's tastes were eclectic and included a love of country.

*Life Is What You Make It* is a standout track, with prominent male backing vocals.

*All My Time* is a beautiful performance of a fine song, and shades the original written and recorded by Carole King, as part of the band, *The City*, on the 1968 album *Now That Everything's Been Said*.

Billy owned a battered copy of this album, from which he took four numbers to cover. Perhaps he got the album from the producer of the *Why Are You Leaving* recording session, Mike Hurst, who owned one.

The self-penned and haunting *Going Round The Bend (Of My Mind)* is most likely from the 1969-71 period.

There is an acoustic version and of course the polished 1982 Polydor era recording, with its outstanding sax and guitar breaks.

The album closes with the beautifully laid-back original version of a song that has become Billy's second anthem (after *Halfway To Paradise*) at all Billy Fury tribute events, *Forget Him*.

This has very special meaning for Billy's fans as it was a posthumous hit, *Let Me Go Lover* being withdrawn after initial limited pressing, and replaced by this lovely number, which should have gone top ten.

*Communication* is one of two versions known to exist, perhaps written by Billy and coupled on an undated acetate with *Bring It Back*.

The recording date is more likely to be later in the EMI years period, around 1970.

The cover of the Tommy Roe hit *Sheila* works well and this version features a looser ending than the more usual "My Bonnie" version featured on *The Complete Parlophone Singles* album.

*River And The Sun*, also on an undated acetate, is an excellent recording, far superior to many of those actually released.

*God Created Woman*, another great performance, is on acetate with *Paradise Alley* so can be dated around 1970.

*Heartbeat* retains the feel of the excellent Buddy Holly original and the fine Bobby Vee cover yet differs sufficiently to be interesting.

*Our Love Has Gone*, sounding totally unlike Billy but a really poignant performance, was written by Chris Andrews and released by Marianne Faithfull on her 1967 album *Love In The Mist*, so this version would likely have been recorded around that time.

*My Whole World* was performed live on Brian Matthew's *Top of the Pops* radio show by Billy in 1966 and backed by the excellent Gamblers, so was probably recorded soon after in early 1967 for EMI.

It had been a single release for Lady Lee, Billy's then girlfriend, Lee Middleton, now Lee Everett-Alkin.

*Reach Out For Your Loving Touch* was also performed on air around the same period and was commercial enough to be a single release.

For the storming version of *My Baby Left Me* there is little doubt that 1967 was the year of recording as Billy performed it on *Top Of The Pops* that year, together with *Hurtin' Is Loving*.

The first two numbers would have made excellent singles, being sufficiently close to the later period Decca-style to have brought lower chart success at least.

The highly catchy and commercial *Right Or Wrong* was performed live on radio around 1967 and would have made a fine single, as was probably intended.

The final track is a real, if flawed, gem: a previously unreleased acetate version of Billy's 1967 single, *Suzanne In The Mirror*, which is substantially different from the single release.

Alleged recordings such as *Over The Hills And Far Away*, *These Days*, *He Looks At Girls* and perhaps others from the 1967-83 period have yet to see the light of day, in addition to the half dozen missing Decca recordings.

Billy probably did not lay down a vocal for Michael Cox's old hit, *Angela Jones*, and almost certainly not for the lovely *Watch The Children Play*.

Stuart Colman wanted Billy to record *Everyday I Have To Cry*, and he should have done, because it's a great track, but the tragic events of 28th January put paid to any hope of that, and Billy was tired of the studio before then.

Billy went on after 1971 to record for Fury, Ronco, Warner Brothers, K-Tel and then Polydor, where he made something of a comeback, with minor chart hits, live, TV and radio appearances.

This UK pop legend was lost to the world on 28th January 1983 yet still today he is highly revered, with a statue at the Pier Head in Liverpool, two fan clubs, several websites, many tribute acts, fan gatherings, and of course the most important thing, music releases.

Regrettably, his musical legacy has yet to see comprehensive issue on boxed sets, and the *Dreamboats and Petticoats* pop music era that Billy typified has still, unforgivingly, to receive the critical acclaim that 50s rock 'n' roll music enjoys.

There are however, some fine packages of his recordings out there, aside from the plentiful but controversial K-Tel reissues, and Billy Fury memorabilia is highly collectable.

*Forget Him* is of course the complete antithesis of the way so many people worldwide still feel today about this iconic figure, and surely will continue to do for many years to come. — **Chris Eley, The Sound Of Fury (Billy Fury fan club).**