

SHADOWS OF THE SEVENTIES

An article covering the Shadows' most creative but criminally overlooked decade.

By Chris Drake



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In August 2013, Music Club Deluxe/Parlophone released a 2CD Shadows compilation CD entitled *The Collection*. The slipcase and inner insert featured a big close-up of the by now obligatory red and white Fender Stratocaster, which during the past 30 or so years has become synonymous with virtually any Shadows-related product. It's an attractive and eye-catching image. What is worth remarking in this case is that the 35 tracks contained within come almost entirely from the 1970s – a period of the Shadows' history in which there wasn't a single red (or *Salmon Pink*!) Fender Strat in sight. But, in fairness, would a close-up of the scratch plate, body and other furnishings, all uniformly in black, have made the product stand out on the shelves? What is interesting also is that the period covered represents something of a commercial low-point for the band, with very little in terms of hit singles and albums compared to the previous decade. What it does contain, on the other hand, is some of the band's most creative and impressive recordings and suggests that perhaps the Shadows' output of the 1970s is worth listening to and evaluating after all. The basis of this article, therefore, will be the contents of MCDLX187: *The Collection*.

Before venturing into the territory so comprehensively covered by the compilation, let's just pause for a few moments to consider the period leading up to it and the way in which the Shadows seemed to prepare the ground for this new and potentially very exciting decade. We'll look at this via the pre-1970 titles featured here.

Interestingly, and perhaps not inappropriately, *The Collection* opens with what would turn out to be The Shadows' last hit single of the 1960s; *Maroc 7*. Written by Paul Ferris, its film-theme origins are betrayed by some rather obvious soundtrack-type orchestral interjections; elsewhere Hank's lead sound is slightly heavier than that for which he was known and Brian's drum sound is, frankly, deep and immense. The combination of the cutting rhythm guitar and tom-tom work during the middle eight ensures that, to some degree, this 1967 single allowed the band to go out with something of a bang. As the decade drew to a close, The Shadows' recorded output would still draw heavily upon film tunes (*Somewhere*) and American songbook standards such as *Stardust*; beautifully played but hardly likely to give the more bluesy and progressive bands of the time a run for their money. Vocals had also become a staple ingredient of both albums and A-single releases, proving that a band known primarily for its instrumental hits could also exercise its vocal chords without any problems. *I Can't Forget* had been performed by the band at the Yugoslavian Split song festival in August 1967 and was a slightly morbid tale of lost love and impending suicide. Hank handles the lead vocals in an appropriately melancholic fashion, whilst the downbeat nature of the song is further emphasised by an orchestration that is, in turn, both dramatic and heart-wrenching. Not a song to listen to if you've just broken up with someone. The point at which things really changed for the Shadows came in December 1968 when, following the departure of Bruce Welch, the band went into the studio and together with new recruit, keyboard player Alan Hawkshaw, recorded their version of Richard Rodgers' *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue*. Although Hawkshaw, on Hammond organ, is relatively underused on this track, this would represent the band's first official foray beyond the classic and well-established two guitars, bass and drums line-up which they had pioneered and for which they were rightly famous. The tune in question would also feature a lush and dramatic orchestration by Brian Bennett and a middle-eight played by Hank on a classical guitar (a sound still relatively rare on Shadows recordings even by that point). The tune would sit on the shelf, as it were, for almost a year, but when released as a single A-side in October 1969 (backed by Hank's solo version of John Barry's theme to *Midnight Cowboy*), it failed to chart. With Bruce gone, the Shadows toured Japan with the new aforementioned keyboard-augmented line-up and backed Cliff Richard for a season of concerts at the London Palladium. And here the 1960s come to an end. Although the band is generally believed to have 'broken up' at this point, as the events of 1970 were to show, this does not, strictly speaking, seem to be the case.

Following the aforementioned live work, the Shadows (dressed formally in dinner suits and bow-ties) appeared with Cliff Richard on an edition of his show, *'It's Cliff'*, broadcast on BBC1 on 31st January 1970. Cliff introduces them in a manner that suggests that they have never been away and together they launch into a very contemporary-sounding version of *Move It*. This would probably have been the general public's first opportunity to see this line-up and one wonders now how they would have greeted the sight of Alan Hawkshaw sitting at a white grand piano and the total absence of guitarist Bruce Welch. During the course of the programme they perform a rather sedate version of *Wonderful Land* (Alan's piano substituting for the rhythm guitar of the original) and can be heard, although not seen, playing *Foot Tapper* during an energetic dance sequence featuring The Young Generation, Cliff and Una Stubbs. At the end of the programme, having undergone a costume change, they back Cliff on an impressive medley of five rock n' roll standards and their own *Do You Wanna Dance*.



2

For the remainder of 1970 there would be little noticeable Shadows activity until the release in October of the album *SHADES OF ROCK*. (SCX 6420) Unfairly judged by some, this is, in fact, a very accomplished album of pop standards performed with gusto and a rawness that suggests the band are striving to move on musically from the sound with which they have become apparently inseparable. For the first time on a Shadows record Hank shares the lead with another player and there are impressive lead contributions from Alan Hawkshaw, particularly on tracks such as *My Babe* and *Lucille*. Brian's drum sound (which really drives the album along) is tight and economical; the snare sound on the aforementioned *Lucille* is especially hard. It's also probably the first Shadows album where you can really hear the bass drum! Although widely acknowledged to have played on at least three tracks on the album, by this point John Rostill was drifting away from the group (primarily as bass player for Tom Jones) and the majority of the bass parts on the album are shared between Herbie Flowers, Brian Odgers and Dave Richmond (although the actual assignation of each is still open to speculation and question). Highlighting a heavier lead sound from Hank and some impressive Motown chops from Brian, *SHADES OF ROCK* is a bold and satisfying album which has never quite received the acclaim it deserves. When released on CD in 2010 by the RPM label (Retro 866) the album boasted photos and credits not found on the original release and a bonus track in the form of *Scotch on the Socks*. Although its inclusion was justified in the impressive sleeve notes, it's a shame that they couldn't have unearthed *High Heeled Sneaker*, a track known to have been recorded for the album during March 1970 but left off the eventual release. The album peaked in the UK charts at number 30 – a not unrespectable position bearing in mind that it was their first studio album in three years. It would be another three years until the next new Shadows album hit the stores and when it did it turned out to be their most powerful and original album to date.

ROCKIN' WITH CURLY LEADS (EMA 762) was released in November 1973 and to this day Brian Bennett regards it as having been their best album. Without a doubt it represents a huge leap forward in terms of creativity and production and sounds like a band really embracing the technology and challenges of the 1970s. With the addition of John Farrar the band has gained an extraordinary song writer and co-lead guitarist and his presence on the album raises it several notches above the previous, admittedly very good, offering. The opening track (a medley of the Who's *Pinball Wizard* and *See Me, Feel Me*), is an explosive statement of intent. Opening with frenetic acoustic rhythm playing and a crashing power-chord, pounding tom-tom fills lead us into three minutes of pure and unadulterated rock. Particularly impressive is Hank's slightly distorted and overdriven sound and the question and answering phrases that he trades with Farrar towards the end of the first piece. A seamless segue into the second piece brings us incredible, yearning lead playing and some searing glissandos (probably, again, from Farrar), towards the end. All in all, possibly the best opening track of any Shadows album up to that point. Although comprising mostly original group compositions, side 2 of the album opens with, if anything, an even more impressive cover version – this time of the Beach Boys' *Good Vibrations*. One would have imagined that it would have been nigh on impossible to reproduce vocally (let alone instrumentally) the complexities of this masterpiece of psychedelic rock. But the Shads manage it in style. The famous harmony vocal parts are played faultlessly by Hank and John and one imagines that the fabled 'Maestro special effects by Henri Selmer and Co Ltd' (as mentioned on the inside of the gatefold sleeve) must have been employed more extensively on this track than on all the others combined. An abrasive string sound could have been produced by scraping the guitar strings with a bow (a la Jimmy Page), but quite how the Theremin and organ sounds were arrived at without access to said instruments remains just one of the mysteries and high points of this superlative track and album in general. Just prior to the album's release, in October 1973, the group-composed *Turn Around and Touch Me* was released as a single. It didn't chart, which is a shame as it bore all the classic Shadows hallmarks (great melody, impeccable playing, etc...) combined with a very modern sound which one could attribute to the band itself arranging and producing the album and thereby being freed from the input and restraints imposed upon them when working in conjunction with a producer and arranger. Allegedly this single was later re-issued with the former B-Side (*Jungle Jam*) now acting as the A-side. The oil crisis of 1973 had certainly led to shortages of such materials as plastic and so if this really is the case, then it cannot be seen as entirely surprising. Peaking at number 45 in the charts, *ROCKIN' WITH CURLY LEADS* was perhaps not the commercial success that the band had hoped for, but with its heavy rock sound and catchy tunes (not to mention its very contemporary gate-fold sleeve and moody black and white cover pic) the album can be seen today as a creative triumph. From this point on, it should also be noted that John Rostill's place in the line-up would be taken by a succession of session bass players, for this album Alan Tarney and later Dave Richmond and Alan Jones.



3

In the spring of 1974, the Shadows re-convened at CTS Studios in Wembley to begin recording the follow-up to *ROCKIN' WITH CURLY LEADS*. Since the album's release, the Shadows had promoted it by appearing on John Peel's 'Sounds on Sunday' (BBC Radio 1, on the 4th of March), and an edition of the Cilla Black Show, on BBC1, from around that time. Very little else seems to have been done by the band to make the general public aware of the album's existence, which is a shame. Nevertheless, the new album would follow roughly the same format as *ROCKIN' WITH CURLY LEADS* and be an instrumental-only collection of original group compositions and covers. By the time the album came out, the following year, developments would have dictated that the content would be drastically different to what was originally intended. But let's not get ahead of ourselves...

Amongst the cover tunes recorded for the album were Jagger and Richards' *Honky Tonk Women*; Elton John and Bernie Taupin's *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* and Sherrill, Wilson and Bourke's *The Most Beautiful Girl*. Regardless of their other merits, the Rolling Stones had always been somewhat shambolic musicians and the Shads slum it for three minutes on this suitably sleazy rendition. There are some nice dirty-sounding riffs and power chords from John, and a sharp, insistent rhythm from Bruce. Brian, having remained suitably restrained for most of the track, throws in a nice long drum fill towards the end which, in the view of this writer, would probably have been beyond Charlie Watts. By now, Hank's increasing use of effects and humbucker pick-ups ensure that his sound is routinely heavier than the cleaner sound for which he was primarily known. *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* and *The Most Beautiful Girl* are more tuneful and by turns they are lifted by John's synth-like guitar effects in the former and some good ol' country style picking in the latter. As noted earlier, developments would lead to these tracks (and one other) being buried and remaining unreleased until 1977.



4

Anyone watching BBC1's *LULU* on Saturday 15th February 1975 might have been surprised to see the Shadows performing the six songs that had been short listed for that year's Eurovision Song Contest. That this primarily instrumental group could actually sing very well, may have come as much of a surprise to many as the simple fact that they were still around, some eight years after their last chart hit. As a five-piece, augmented on bass by Alan Tarney, the band ran through the six numbers in question (two of which had been written by Bennett and Farrar respectively) before the whole thing was repeated and the public asked to vote. In the event ***Let Me Be The One***, written by Paul Curtis, stormed into first place and it would be this song that the Shadows would perform in Sweden on 22nd March. Sadly, on the night, the song was beaten into second place by the (now obscure) Dutch entry *Ding A Dong*. Just as sadly, Brian was not permitted to use his eye-catching pink premier drum kit (which he had had custom painted for the event) during the actual contest.

With the band riding high on the success and exposure that the contest had given them, the album *SPECS APPEAL* (EMC 3066) was released to tie-in with their currently high profile. On the cover of the album, John, Bruce, Hank and Brian pose casually against a wall smothered with posters advertising albums and concerts by the likes of Argent, Queen and Status Quo. That these bands had all been influenced at least partly by the Shadows was a fact that was probably not lost on them. As it was, the striking image placed them firmly amongst the ranks of rock's progressive and powerful elite. A position that the album would more than justify.

The album opens with ***God Only Knows***, which, although less intricate than their previous Beach Boys cover, succeeds in transferring this strongly melodic and vocally expressive song into the idiom of the rock instrumental with no difficulty. The clip-clopping rhythm and keyboard interjections (courtesy of Graham Todd) are nice and, as if to remind people of their Marvin, Welch and Farrar period, the middle-eight features faultless vocal harmonies of which surely the composers would be proud. A few years later the band would dub a heavier drum sound and completely new lead guitar onto this track with a view to a possible single release. Sadly this move seemed

to strip the tune of its original subtleties and perhaps fortunately the single release was never forthcoming. *Like Strangers*, composed by Welch and Bennett is, quite simply, one of the most impressive and evocative instrumentals the band would ever record. Opening with a shimmering rhythm from Bruce, the lead guitar, when it comes in, sounds heavy with regret and sadness. The unusual placing of the bass drum during the verses (where the snare should really be) gives the song an odd, off-beat quality, like two people, once close, now out of kilter with each other. The beat reverts to normal during the chorus and, together with the exultant ARP synthesiser, suggests a brief reconciliation, before the couple drift apart once more. Of course, that's just my interpretation! Having displaced the originally intended instrumentals, the six Eurovision songs are of varying quality, but few could argue that *Let Me Be The One* was the most obvious contest entry of the lot. As lead singer, Bruce excels himself on what is essentially a lively and catchy love song. The backing vocals are perfect, causing a friend of mine to comment that the song was a 'master class in vocal harmony'. The guitar solo, which more or less follows the lead melody, is Hank at his best. Released as a single in the wake of the contest, *Let Me Be The One* reached a respectable number 12 in the UK charts. There really is nothing bad to say about this song, except that it should have won! *Stand Up Like A Man*, with lead vocal (in falsetto) from John Farrar, could easily have been the UK's entry into the contest, as it came second in the initial voting. Undoubtedly a better song than *LMBTW*, it was perhaps less Eurovision-centric and this may have counted against it. Having said that, had it have been released in its own right as a single, instead of being placed on the B-side of *Let Me Be The One*, then it may well have been a substantial hit. John's voice, although lamenting a loss, somehow manages to avoid being sickly and is superseded on the chorus by a complementary harder-edged vocal from Welch. Plaintive guitar lines from Hank and some powerful fluid drum fills from Brian round off what is undoubtedly one of the vocal highlights of the Shads' career. In a not dissimilar vein, *Don't Throw It All Away* is a heartfelt plea and one which Bruce puts voice to with total sincerity and feeling. Again, no solo, but Hank's guitar seems to sing during the verses. And again this really *should* have been released as a single. Peaking at number 30, *SPECS APPEAL* may have had its shape dramatically altered by the inclusion of the Eurovision songs but containing, as it did, several of the band's finest (and most progressive) instrumentals, it is an album of great merit, albeit slightly less cohesive in nature than its immediate predecessor.

In the wake of their Eurovision success, the Shadows decided to release another vocal as their next single. However, instead of one of the other rather excellent songs from the *SPECS APPEAL* album they chose *Run Billy Run*, another song from writer Paul Curtis which, it has to be said, paled into insignificance compared to his previous offering. Released in June '75, it went nowhere, due possibly to its melodic similarity to *Let Me Be The One* and its totally uninspiring lyrical subject matter. Listened to now it is difficult to find anything positive to say about it.



5/6

It would be almost a year before the next new Shadows' single release and, happily, this one would be much, much better. Released in May 1976, *It'll Be Me Babe* is a catchy, disco-flavoured foot tapper from the pens of Marvin and Farrar. Quite how this little gem failed to chart is still something of a mystery. It had all the hallmarks of a classic summer hit; driving rhythm, commercial, upbeat lyrics, some *Shaft*-type guitar in the choruses and deep, pounding drums (not to mention some deep, spoken lines from Hank in a kind of cod-Barry White style just before the outro). It should have been a hit. But it wasn't. A video was made for it; notable mainly for the sight of Bruce miming to John Farrar's falsetto parts due to Farrar having left the band by this point. Maybe if it had been released in '75 (when it was recorded) and *before* Farrar left, it might have fared better. As it was it would be another couple of years before the Shadows released a single destined for the charts. In the meantime, however, a return to the album charts, in a very big way, was just around the corner.

In February 1977, having had success with similar compilations from other artists, EMI released *THE SHADOWS 20 GOLDEN GREATS* (EMTV 3). Its incredible success would take almost everyone by surprise. Rapidly climbing the album chart all the way to number 1, the album racked up sales in excess of one million and spurred the band onto undertake a short UK tour during May of that year. Prior to this, and in the immediate wake of the album's release, Bruce, Hank and Brian, along with Alan Tarney, went into Abbey Road studios to record a new album. Although not featured during the tour, *Another Night* was released as the first single from the album in July '77. The tune, which was composed by Welch, Marvin & Bennett with Alan Tarney, was fairly representative of the forthcoming album; featuring, as it does, a good melody, faultless playing and crystal-clear production. A chugging intro (which sounds a bit like the opening to the theme to BBC1's *Multi-Coloured Swap Shop*!) gives way to bass and drums interjecting in unison, before being joined by a lead guitar sound which seems much closer to the classic Shadows sound than had been heard since the 1960s. By this point, it must be safe to assume that Hank had ditched most of the heavy-rock augmentation that had defined most of the band's early-mid seventies output, resulting in not only a sound but also a playing style that harks back to a bygone age (his dampened strings alternating with the lilting, almost Hawaiian guitar effect during the outro is especially pleasing). Tarney's bass sound is powerful, warm and creamy – possibly the best it has ever sounded – and Brian's kit sound (particularly the tom toms) is totally beyond reproach. The single, like their previous two vocal releases, was not a hit, but it marked the return to a style of playing and

writing that had been absent for a long time. The relatively few number of people who bought the single had every right to feel optimistic about the future.

One can only guess at what was behind the Shads' decision not to play any of the new tracks (with the exception of a cover of the Ventures' *Walk Don't Run*) on the 20 Golden Dates Tour. Certainly, when *TASTY* (EMC 3195)) came out in August 1977, it turned out to be packed with tunes that, although unfamiliar, would almost certainly have gone down well with the nostalgic, capacity audiences that turned out night after night. To say that *Return to the Alamo* was one of the best things that the Shadows ever recorded would not, in the opinion of this writer, be an overstatement. From Bruce's subtle acoustic guitar during the intro, to the incredible orchestra (courtesy of Norrie Paramor) that swells and lifts the tune in much the same way as it had done on *Wonderful Land* 15 years earlier, this Welch, Marvin, Bennett-composed tune is a timeless masterpiece which stands up to anything in the band's extensive catalogue. Of course Brian's drum sound is far more expansive and powerful than ever it had been in the 1960s, but with that exception, listening to this track is like listening to a lost classic from 1961. Hank's sound on this piece is, quite simply, faultless in every possible respect; lyrical, deep and resonant for the most part and suitably dramatic and slightly heavier during the middle eight - the apparent dropped note at 03.34 (deliberate or otherwise) only adds to the magic. This piece would mark Norrie's final collaboration with the Shadows (as he would pass away in 1979) and he could not have asked for a better one to act as his musical swansong. A shame that this, in particular, was not played live during the May tour, as with the help of Francis Monkman's keyboards, it would almost certainly have been the surprise hit of the night. As things stand, *Return to the Alamo* is, quite simply, an epic instrumental that the band, during their renaissance period, was never able to better. *Montezuma's Revenge* benefited firstly from one of those tongue-in-cheek titles that the Shads had employed quite effectively since the '60s and a melody and performance that, once again, is now the stuff of legend. An intro laced with driving bass, insistent drums and a ringing rhythm guitar gives way to a tune as memorable as its title. Hank is double tracked and in harmony for the chorus and the middle eight is notable for Brian's tour de force of exotic percussion and Alan Tarney's unwavering, rich-sounding bass. It is, without a doubt, one of the many high-points of the album.



Cricket Bat Boogie seems to allude to the band's 1950s origins in its melody and sound; whilst yet another tongue-in-cheek title seems to refer to the millions of kids who (as popular myth has it) mimed to Shads records with the aforementioned item. The intro attacks like a machine gun, before giving way to a walking rock n' roll bass-line. Fats Domino and Jerry Lee Lewis would surely have been proud of Brian's piano interlude halfway through and the surprise double-ending is a nice touch. This one really should have been released as a single. Sadly, *TASTY* failed to chart upon its release and although Brian has since voiced dissatisfaction at its production, the album (contained within an eye catching jet-black sleeve with a partly peeled orange taking the place of the 'O' in the band's name) is far from a disappointment. Of some interest are the adverts promising '...12 juicy new tracks.' In the end, the album would in fact contain just 11. Still, it was definitely a case of quality over quantity as *TASTY* (bolstered with four of the left-over tracks recorded in '74 and originally destined for *SPECS APPEAL*) is by far the best album they produced during their renaissance years.



8



9/10



11

For some reason I suspect that the success of the Sweet's surprise comeback single *Love is Like Oxygen* (number 9 in March 1978) didn't go unnoticed by the Shadows. In August '78 the Shads unleashed *Love Deluxe* on the unsuspecting (and sadly unresponsive) public in a bid to secure a chart hit with yet another vocal release. The song, written by Tom Shapiro, bears more than a passing resemblance to *Love is Like Oxygen* in both its construction and sound – even the promo video (featuring the band in a mock live performance) seems to have been influenced by the Sweet's own promo video (watch them both side by side and see what you think). A disco song, definitely, *Love Deluxe* opens with a chugging guitar/piano riff which is quickly succeeded by an interesting dual melody played (by guest musician Adrian Lee) on piano and synthesizer. Depending upon how you listen to it, it's not easy to tell here which instrument is supposed to be playing the lead or sub-melody. Bruce takes care of the lead vocals, with Hank playing a rather minor role in the proceedings by supplying little more than ringing power-chords underneath the main tune. Perhaps most notably, this record represents Brian's first use (on a Shads record) of his syndrums which are employed effectively during the middle eight and both before and after each chorus. Speaking of the middle eight, Bruce shouts the refrain "*You've got to hide away*" in a manner more in keeping with the vocal delivery of a hard rock song. With its disco beat, sweeping synth sounds and vocal nature, *Love Deluxe* was never going to be a typical Shadows single. That it wasn't a chart hit must have come as a huge disappointment to not only the Shads themselves but also to Cliff Richard who, in a radio interview at the time, remarked how he hoped they could do with it what he had done with *Devil Woman*. Sadly, it was not to be. Simply referred to as 'B-Side' during its recording, *Sweet Saturday Night* was indeed the B-side of the single, but, in the view of this writer at least, could just as easily have been the A-side. Composed by Welch, Marvin, Bennett, this instrumental is another extremely strong melody, which sees Hank employing a reasonably up to date guitar sound as opposed to the retro-feel of the previous album. Brian's snare is heavy, the bass drum is like a thudding heartbeat, *Hill Street Blues* type piano stabs and synthesised bleeps punctuate the piece whilst Bruce's guitar jangles away nicely. An economic middle eight features what sounds like Hank playing a Roland guitar-synth, some

atmospheric percussion effects and someone (possibly Brian) laughing madly in the background. The outro, which features three multi-tracked lead guitars playing in harmony, is an effective way to finish. *Sweet Saturday Night* may well have been little more than a throwaway tune, but it was very 1978, very good and might very well have been a hit. As it was, that elusive hit single was closer than anyone thought and a spectacular return to the charts was literally just around the corner, albeit with a record that marked a return once and for all to the classic instrumental Shadows sound.

It was during the Shadows' autumn tour of 1978 that their rendition of *Don't Cry For Me Argentina* became an instant live favourite. So the story goes, night after night, the ecstatic audiences literally shouted out for the band to 'record it!'. And record it they did – although not, as stated on the record sleeve, 'live'. Top and tailed with applause taken from the March '78 recordings of their reunion shows with Cliff, the single version that was released in December differed slightly from both their live version and the initial studio recording. Here, Bruce's introduction is performed on acoustic guitar, rather than electric, and a lengthy, slower section is excised all together. The result is an abbreviated but atmospheric version of their live performance which is distinguished by a virtuoso performance from Hank, playing the lead vocal melody with characteristic sensitivity and finesse, and dramatic tympani accompaniment from Brian during the choruses. The single received extensive radio airplay, charting in early 1979 and reaching a very impressive number 5. As they entered their 21st year in the business, the Shadows were riding higher in the singles charts than they had done since the mid 1960s!



12/13

Inevitably a follow-up single was required, by the record company and the general public alike, and a similarly arranged version of *Cavatina (The Theme from The Deer Hunter)* was released in May. Like the previous single it began with a slightly mournful acoustic rhythm guitar and excised a lengthy middle section of the tune. Hank's playing on this piece is absolutely sublime, his phrasing amongst his most expressive. As with the previous single, string synthesisers (courtesy of Dave Lawson) add atmosphere and an extra lift here and there. The band had the pleasure of seeing the single peak at number 9 on the chart.

The late summer of 1979 saw the Bruce Welch produced Cliff Richard single *We Don't Talk Anymore* reach the coveted number 1 spot on the singles charts and no doubt buoyed by this, the Shadows released their by now long awaited album at the end of August. *STRING OF HITS* (EMC 3310), as the name implied, was an extremely accomplished collection of well known songs given the inimitable Shadows

treatment. There was also a lone group composed tune and a surprising foray into the realm of classical-pop fusion. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as the most successful Shadows album release of the '70s, **The Collection** sees fit to include *STRING OF HITS* in virtually its entirety – only (ironically) John Farrar's *You're the One That I Want* is left out! By now Hank had settled on a guitar sound that was a pleasing mix of both the vintage Shads sound and the slightly harsher sound which he had employed for most of the 1970s. Having said that, **Classical Gas**, as the title suggests, found Hank playing the piece entirely on classical guitar. 1979 was one of the golden years of disco and so perhaps it shouldn't be that surprising to note that the Shads give this old Mason Williams tune a bit of a disco feel. Despite a nicely picked but sedate intro, the drums kick in at 120 bpm and it's onto the proverbial dance floor. A very contemporary orchestration (courtesy of Steve Gray) and Dave Lawson's lead synth playing distinguish the piece, as does Brian's tasteful syn-drum break towards the end. A fantastic rendition, which really should have been released as a single! Blondie had enjoyed a massive hit the previous year with their disco classic **Heart of Glass** and here the Shadows replicate the arrangement almost exactly, with Hank's lead guitar standing as the only really noticeable deviation from the original. A juddering synthesizer provides the backing, with a great disco bass-line from Alan Jones and an insistent scraping rhythm from Bruce. Brian's drum fills are a little more controlled than those of Clem Burke, but otherwise you could almost be listening to Blondie! The disco feel continues with a truly storming version of **Riders in the Sky** which reached number 12 on the chart when released as a single the following year. Kicking off with a heavy snare and thudding bass drum, this is a slightly speeded up version of the track which originally opened the album. A driving electric rhythm guitar backs up the acoustic guitar of the original, whilst rippling synths and prominent bass ensure that no-one is sitting still during this one. The icing on the cake, for many, is Brian's syn-drums which come in at the halfway point and then again during the outro. Apparently it was due to audience response that this (reworked following the tour) was released as a single – and what a brilliant choice it was too! An instant classic. Recorded for, but ultimately left off, the album was a perhaps slightly overcooked version of the La Belle Epoque 1977 disco hit **Black Is Black**. Bruce's tasteful acoustic intro is quickly overwhelmed by a lively rendition awash with synthesizers and the inevitable syn-drums which, in this case, are treated to ensure that the final note either bounces up and down somewhat drunkenly or seems to whiz off into space. Perhaps not as satisfying as the other disco-inspired tunes that made the final cut, it was, none the less a minor hit when later released as a single in Finland. Gary Moore's collaboration with fellow Thin Lizzy luminary Phil Lynott had reached number 9 in the singles charts earlier in the year, which made **Parisienne Walkways** an obvious choice for this album. Obvious not only because it has a beautiful melody, but also because Moore was one of the legion of rock guitarists who openly acknowledged the debt they owed to the Shadows. And the debt is repaid with an expressive instrumental rendition with just slightly less edge than was perhaps required. Hank's guitar, none the less, soars and Brian maintains a solid beat. Another very obvious contender for single release which, had it have been granted, may well have seen this chart successfully. **Bridge Over Troubled Water** had been a hit for Simon and Garfunkel in 1970 and resurrecting it almost ten years later was not an obvious move. Having said that, the Shadows take its haunting and familiar tune and, even without its – some would say necessary – lyrics, turn it into another instrumental ballad of not inconsiderable merit. You have to listen hard to hear Bruce, as the piece does not perhaps lend itself to rhythm guitar. Hank's sublime phrasing

substitutes nicely for the vocals, whilst Brian keeps the whole thing moving and manages one of his most tasteful fills at the two minute, 15 seconds mark. Overall, however, the piece is distinguished by a Steve Gray's emotional orchestral arrangement and the return to the fold of Alan Hawkshaw on piano. An even less obvious choice for the album, perhaps, was *Rodrigo's Guitar Concerto de Aranjuez*. It seemed that in the wake of *Cavatina* and with John Williams' Sky snapping at their heels, the key to chart success was another quasi-classical offering. Unfortunately, when released as a single in October of '79, the piece failed to chart. With its epic orchestration and emotive solo guitar voice, this is a truly impressive piece of work. It does, however, lack the commercial hook that had made its predecessor such a hit. Again, though, Steve Gray excels himself as a string arranger and the orchestra sweeps, swells and weaves in and out of the main tune. One of the album's truly standout tracks, but perhaps better to have left it on the album. Far more commercial and a more obvious choice are both Art Garfunkel's film theme weepy *Bright Eyes* and Gerry Rafferty's once heard never forgotten *Baker Street*. Both arrangements stick very closely to the originals, with synths standing in for the strings on the former and Hank's guitar handling the now legendary saxophone solo on the latter. Both pieces have extremely strong melodies and, when the source material is of this quality, the Shadows can't really put a foot wrong. And they don't! Haunting and uplifting in turns, both tracks display the band's ability to take a song and make it their own. Speaking of which, the Welch, Bennett, Marvin-composed *Song for Duke* may have seemed out of place at first on an album otherwise devoted to well known tunes, but this would surely have been remedied had it have been released as a single. All the Shadows trademarks are present and correct on what is one of the most pleasing and instantly memorable tunes produced by the group during the 1970s. The sweeping synths that open the piece are lush and smooth, whilst Hank's sound is clear and distinct; making the most of a tune that is easily the equal of most on the album. Brian's double-time drumming during the choruses and Bruce's easy rhythm are notable, as are Hank's dampened strings towards the end. As a group composition, it's easily up there with the best. John Wayne would indeed have been proud. Partly thanks to the pedigree of its contents, an eye-catching sleeve design (a Fender Stratocaster formed from an apparently warped vinyl disc) and the high profile that the band was enjoying in the wake of several hit singles, *STRING OF HITS* made the top ten before the end of the year and in early 1980 hit the top spot. By what must have been pure coincidence, the Shadows ended the 1970s in much the same manner as they had started it – with an album of timeless classics reworked in their own distinctive and, in a way, timeless style. A number one album is not a bad way to close a chapter and with the band's imminent departure from EMI, that glorious (but often overlooked) era was about to come to an end.

To try and do this amazing decade justice in an article of this length is nigh on impossible, as a book could be written about it quite easily. *The Collection* provided the inspiration for this piece, but a double album can only contain so many tunes and the wealth of truly incredible material that neither the album nor this article have been able to include is staggering. They may have sold more records during the 1960s and the 1980s, but for me the 1970s saw the Shadows at their artistic and creative peak. Listen to the tracks I have covered (and the many that I haven't) and see if you agree.

Chris Drake
October 2013

NOTES ON ILLUSTRATIONS

1

Hank, Brian and Bruce (looking a bit chilly!) pictured in early 1977.

2

A rarely seen photo of the line-up from late 1969. Alan Hawkshaw is second from the left. John Rostill is seated.

3

Performing Let Me Be The One on television in 1975. Note Bruce's bass.

4

The Eurovision line-up during BBC television performances of all six songs, 1975. John Farrar and Alan Tarney are pictured on the right. Note Brian's beautifully customised drum-kit and 'Tree of Life' front bass head.

5/6

A very casually dressed Hank and Bruce and Alan Tarney in the promo video for It'll Be Me Babe, 1976.

7

Cricket Bat Boogie! The boys celebrate the success of 20 Golden Greats in 1977.

8

Press advert for TASTY, August 1977. Obviously produced before the actual number of tracks was finalised.

9/10

Two shots from the promo video for Love De Luxe, 1978.

11

Live on stage in early 1978. Keyboard player Cliff Hall is pictured on the far left, with bassist Alan Jones centre.

12/13

Appearing on Dutch television in 1979 to promote Cavatina. Note that Bruce's guitar appears to be miked.