

THERE ARE ONLY TWO PHIL SPECTORS IN THE WORLD AND I AM ONE OF THEM

Selected tableaux from The Guy Stevens Story by Charles Shaar Murray

"They rushed down the street together, digging everything in the early way they had, which later became so much sadder and perceptive and blank. But then they danced down the street like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centrelight pop and everybody goes 'Awwwwwwww!'..."

— Jack Kerouac, *'On The Road'*
"He's in love with rock and roll, WOOAAHHH! He's in love with getting stoned, WOOAAHHH!"

— The Clash, *'Janie Jones'*

"With Guy Stevens it was very, very special, because if it hadn't been for him seeing that glimmer of whatever that I certainly wasn't aware of, I'd still be workin' in the factory right now."

— Ian Hunter

Guy Stevens? Forget him. He's had it."
— A Music Industry Figure

TAKE A DEEP breath and you could recount the Guy Stevens story in one sentence.

Kingpin mod deejay at the Scene Club in '64, Our Man In London for Sue Records, the legendary soul label, first house producer for Island Records where he signed and produced Free and Spooky Tooth as well as inventing Mott The Hoople, discoverer of The Clash after a long time in hibernation and now finally producer of their new album 'London Calling'. The man who got Chuck Berry out of jail in 1964, the man who supplied The Who with the compilation tape that gave them most of their early pre-original material repertoire, the man who introduced Keith Reid to Procol Harum and generated 'Whiter Shade Of Pale' only to fail to get them signed up and then had to stand by and watch them sell 90,000,000 copies for someone else, the man who smashed up every piece of furniture in a recording studio to get the performance he wanted out of the group he was recording, the man who Mick Jones of The Clash still thinks is responsible for getting him fired from his first real band, the man who heard Phil Spector rant about how it was him, Phil Spector, who first discovered The Beatles, the man who...

Guy Stevens, with the rolling, popping, bulging eyes of a veteran form speedfreak, the boozier's lurch and slur, smashing through or falling over every obstacle between him and the perfect rock and roll record, the ultimate rock and roll record, the final rock and roll record the next rock and roll record... be that obstacle, human or inanimate, himself or something else. Staggering, screaming, crying, flailing, laughing, Guy Stevens arouses pity, terror, admiration, revulsion, contempt.

In 1971 they wrote him off as a hopeless loser, a man too far gone into the depths of alcoholics' perdition to be of any use to himself or anyone else again.

And now, in the closing weeks of 1979, Guy Stevens is back in the charts. It is — as they say — a mighty long way down rock and roll. The inevitable corollary is that it's an even longer way back up again. Guy Stevens has been to hell and back.

WHAT HAPPENED was I was living in a one-room no-water flat in Leicester Square and playing records for Ronan O'Rahilly — later of Radio Caroline — down at the Scene Club. I had an R&B night every Monday, and a lot of people like the Stones and Animals used to come down...

Guy Stevens is ensconced in a taxi heading for a friend's flat, where our interview is scheduled to take place. He had arrived at the NME offices half an hour late and roaring drunk, his hand lacerated and bleeding following some sort of incident with a glass door. Apparently, the prospect of being interviewed — at once exhilarating and terrifying — had sent him down to the pub as soon as it opened. He is 15 years away in time, back when Mod really was mod, back when Guy Stevens had a direct line to R&B central.

"I got all my records mail-order. You sent 'em the money and got the records back within seven days from Stan's Records Store in Shreveport, Louisiana, USA and it's right down deep in Tennessee..."

Wait a second, Guy. How can it be in Tennessee if it's in Louisiana?

"Well, it's somewhere around there. It all started for me when I was 11 years old and the first record I ever heard was 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On' by Jerry Lee Lewis and that was the end of my school career. What I did was to start this thing at school where every boy in the school had to pay me a shilling a week — that's 5p — to be a member of my rock and roll club, and I chose the records. We had 'Peggy Sue, That'll Be The Day', Larry Williams' 'Bony Maronie', all the hits of the time, Jerry Lee Lewis' 'Great Balls Of Fire'... and I got expelled for it eventually.

"So I was expelled at 14, and I went to work for Lloyds, the insurance brokers. They thought I was kinda funny. By '63 I had all these records that I'd imported from Stan's Record Store in Shreveport Louisiana, right?... And Peter Meaden came round one night. He was the bloke who formed The Who, and he arranged to bring them round one day with their manager, Kit Lambert.

"And they were really weird. They just stood there. My wife, who I was then living with — we're separated now — made a cup of tea for each one of them and they still stood still. I played 'em 'Rumble' by Link Wray and put it on a tape for them — because by then I'd built up this enormous collection and Steve Marriott and everybody used to come round to get material.

"So The Who were there with Kit Lambert, and he offered me a fiver to make a two-and-a-half-hour tape for them, because Townshend hadn't started writing and they had no material to play on stage. So I played 'em all James Brown stuff, 'Pleeeeeease Pleeeeeease Pleeeeeease Pleeeeeease'... Hair flying, right there in the cab, Stevens becomes James Brown. "And I played 'em 'Rumble' by Link Wray, which was the classic Pete Townshend record, which he'd never heard before."

Stevens' mouth begins to emit gigantic, grinding guitar chords and odd flecks of spittle. Demonic possession by a guitar.

"So Townshend, Daltrey, Entwistle and Moon sat there for three hours drinking tea looking like little schoolboys and my poor wife was going, 'Would you like another cup of tea' and

they're saying, 'Uh... well... um... ah... dunno,' and I'm playing the records going, 'Jesus Christ! WAKE UP!' I was going through my cabinet where I had all my singles, I had every Motown single, every Stax... I went to Stax in Memphis in 1963 and they said, 'It's just a record shop'. I said no, no, you've got a studio and they say, 'We're just a record shop'. So I went behind the shop and there was the studio where Booker T made 'Green Onions'. The whole lot, Rufus Thomas... and it was the size of this taxi we're sitting in now."

One visualises a younger Stevens, mod suit, hair cropped short, ranting and screaming at the bemused counter assistant at Stax, or a young, shy Who clutching cooling teacups while this maniac jumps up and down, hitting them with soul music and screaming...

"And at Stax I said to them in 1963, 'Don't you understand the importance of what you're doing?' I can't tell you enough... they were nuts! They thought the record shop was more important than the studio!"

The whole industry thinks shops are more important than studios, though.

"Well, if they think filing cabinets are gonna sell records, then they'd better start selling them now. Records sell because they are made by dedicated people who love to sing and love to play, and that's what it's about. The record companies are full of people who are either secretaries, hangers-on or people who don't know anything about music all thinking, 'Well, it's better than working in a bank'."

FROM DEEJAYING, scenemaking and propagandising blues, soul and rock and roll, Stevens moved to operating Sue Records as part of the then fledgling Island label. From living off what he made from selling Scene Club tickets at Piccadilly Circus tube station, he graduated to a £15 a week salary from Island. From label administration to production was only one band away.

"What happened was that these guys came down from Carlisle in a van in '65. They were called The V.I.P.'s, later to be known as Spooky Tooth, and they were all nutters, all complete maniacs, and they ambushed Island Records at the same time as I did. I was always at total war with Chris Blackwell (then — as now — Island's headman) and... I can't put him down in a nice way, really. He was always a millionaire dilettante: he had a million anyway so he didn't need to bother, but I never knew this. I had just started the Sue label, and I got Charlie & Inez Foxx, I got James Brown, I got a hell of a lot.

"Sue was formed by a guy called Juggy Murray in New York, and he started the label with Charlie & Inez Foxx's 'Mockingbird'; that was Sue 301. I went over to get a record called 'The Love Of My Man', which nobody has covered, and I hope Elkie Brooks isn't listening. 'The Love Of My Man' by Viola Kilgore. Unbelievable. Un-be-liev-able. Blitzkrieg, out

the window, number one, easy. He owned copyright. Chris went over and offered \$500. Juggy wanted half a million. It got in the American charts; if you check back you find it. One of the greatest records I've ever heard in my life.

"I wanted it to be on Sue. The main thing was that I wanted everything good to be on Sue. I wanted Bob Dylan to be on Sue. That was what started importing records for Island with D. Betteridge (now a CBS high-up) and Chris it nearly bankrupted Island."

BY NOW we're established in a luxury flat belonging to a friend of Guy's drinking coffee and brandy, except Kosmo Vinyl — acting as Guy's part-time minder on behalf of The Clash — is surreptitiously filching Guy's brandy glass every time it's refilled and drinking it himself. Guy doesn't appear to notice, since every so often he is allowed to take a sip.

We're in '67 now, discussing the first Traffic album 'Dear Mr Fantasy', the getting-it-together-in-a-cottage-in-the-country one with the ghost on the cover. "I did that cover! I went down to the cottage in Berkshire with them, I did the cover, I did everything! It sounds terrible to say all this... maybe I should say nothing. What do you want me to say?"

"Tell 'im the facts, Guy," interjects Kosmo from across the room.

"Steve Winwood asked me to come down, said 'I want you to produce Traffic and live with us'. So I went down there and it was a bit fairytale, a bit weird. There were some very weird things going on. They were smoking a hell of a lot, and each one of them would come out and say to me, 'Oh God, I can't go on with life' and all this. That was Jim Capaldi. Then Steve Winwood would come out with, 'I can't cope! It's all gone too far! It's all too much! We've had a hit single! Oh God!' And then Chris Wood started going, 'Oh God! I've had enough'."

"I said, 'Hang on, I've just heard this from three people! What is this? Have you all leapt off parrot fashion or what?' I was down there, with all my belongings, all my records and everything thinking 'Jesus Christ, they're all going mad!' And what they were all going mad over was Steve's girlfriend, but that's definitely another story..."

"But the worst thing that happened between me and Blackwell was the 'Whiter Shade Of Pale' incident. He had it on his desk for a week! What happened was this boy I knew called Keith Reid came into the office with these words he'd written. He worked in a solicitors' office for £4.50 a week, and he brought in these words which were vaguely Dylanish, and I told him the words were great and suggested that he got himself to a good songwriter."

Reid ended up with Gary Brooker and Procol Harum. Chris Blackwell turned the result down, and when it was finally issued elsewhere, it made number one in two weeks flat, became one of the biggest records of '67 and still sells astronomical quantities whenever it's reissued. Guy Stevens had a nervous breakdown.

At the same time, Guy's massive record collection was stolen from his mother's house in 1967, and — to add insult to injury — the thief sold them all off for ninepence each (that's old money. In contemporary currency that would be 3.75p each. Weep!).

"The guy didn't know what he was selling. I had every Miracles record. Every Muddy Waters record. I had every Chess record from 001. Listen! I was at a session with Phil Chess in 1964 with Chuck Berry when he was doing 'Promised Land' and 'Nadine'. I was at the session! I was taking photographs! I got Chuck Berry out of prison! I put tremendous pressure on Pye Records, who had Chess and Checker over here, and the head of the company at the time was Ian Ralfini.

"I put pressure on him to get 'Memphis Tennessee' released as a single. It was out as a B-side, with 'Let It Rock'. They taped all the Chuck Berry tracks off my records! Not from master tapes but from my records! I mean, you may have spat on them or something. You never know what happens, do you? Now you'll know that if your old Chuck Berry records jump or something, it's probably me spitting on them."

"The first thing I actually produced was with Spooky Tooth. It was called 'In A Dream' built up. All my records build up



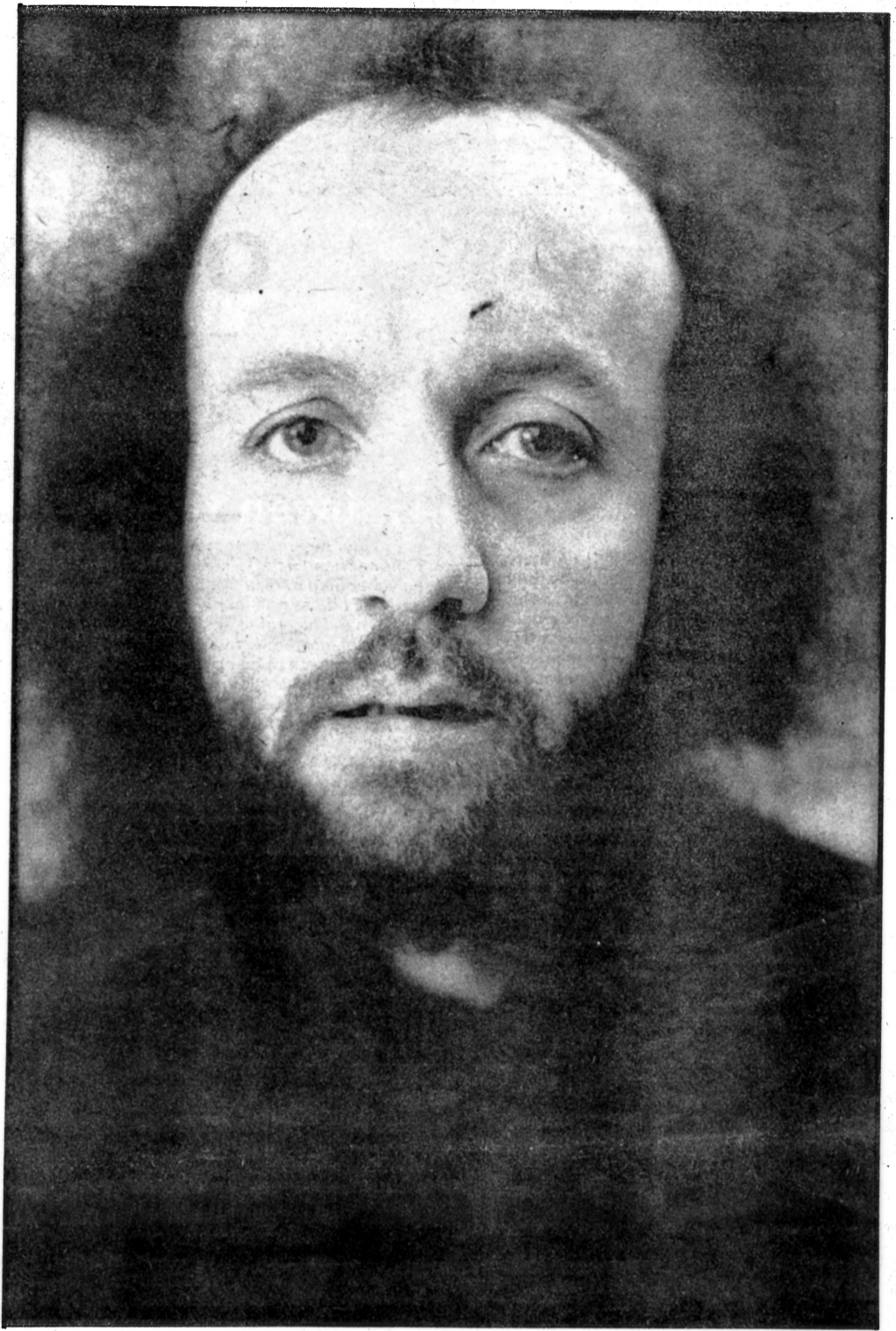
"Hey Joe, d'you like Chuck Berry?" "Well, OK then... but just a small glass." Strummer grins smugly after finally meeting someone who is older than Charlie Harper of The UK Subs. Pic: Pennie Smith.



Above: Guy Stevens meets Chuck Berry 1964. "Here Chuck, inventing rock'n'roll as we know it must be a pretty taxing occupation." "Not sure if I care fo' yo' choice o' words boy..."

Below: Guy fails the audition for the Mott The Hoople second XI, circa '68. For some reason, Island used this as a publicity handout shot. (L-R): Stevens, Mick Ralphs, Ian Oonter, Overend Watts, Verden Allen, Buffin.

Right: Just as we always pictured a Clash producer. Pic: Pennie Smith.



... that? Now, what I've done with the new album is I've made 'em actually play a bit. It's that's no offence to anyone... they aren't turned into Andy Williams or anything. Actually, I could do a really good Andy Williams. You wanna hear an Andy Williams impression?"

Guy lurches to his feet, something like a slow-motion film of somebody falling over projected in reverse. He approaches the white piano in the corner of the room, punches out a horribly discordant introduction to 'Moon River', saunters to the centre of the room and collapses into a paroxysm of mock sobbing. He chokes out an anguished monologue about Claudine Longet and the death of the ski instructor and then returns cautiously to the sofa.

"That's it. Ask me another question. Now the thing is that these blokes — Spooky Tooth — came down from Carlisle in a van, and they were incredibly heavy, both physically and because they were all taking about 500 blues a week. I loved them. I thought they were incredible and I took Blackwell along to see them. 'Spooky Two' was the album. The mixing on that was incredible: that was my engineer Andy Johns. I don't know what happened to him. He's still alive, but he's in America.

"Andy — if you're listening — please come home." Stevens lurches closer to the cassette microphone and raises his voice. "You can work with anyone here at any time, but" — confidentially now — "don't get messed up like you did before."

AND THEN came Mott The Hoople, and that story starts "in Wormwood Scrubs. I was doing eight months for possession of drugs and I read this book called *Mott The Hoople* by Willard Manus. I wrote to my wife and said, 'Keep the title secret'. She was my ex-wife, or separated wife, I don't know what they call them, and she wrote back, 'Are you joking? *Mott The Hoople*? That's ridiculous!' Anyway, when I came out of prison Island re-employed me at £20 a week — I went up a fiver — and I've got to admit that Mr Betteridge came and picked me up from the gates of Wormwood Scrubs.

"And then I wanted to have a pee, and he said, 'Fuck that, have a pee if you want one, but I'll be two miles down the road'. I said, 'Wait a minute, I just got out of prison! Show some sensitivity, for fuck's sake! I don't even know

what roads look like anymore.' So I went for a pee and he drove off, and then finally he said, 'Oh, I didn't know you were following us'. I only found them because my wife was waving her arms out of the window and yelling..."

Memories cascade out of Stevens, virtually unchecked. He is obviously pissed and ranting, but there is something eerie about his conversation: he appears more medium than raconteur. His voice undergoes startling changes; one moment almost precise, the next moment so alien that it seems as if he is maintaining his grip on the art of speech only by a conscious effort. He recalls Janis Joplin telling him at the Albert Hall that she was going to overdose within a year. "She was the kind of girl who would walk into a bar and just take over the whole bar. She'd walk up and... 'Awwwwww! raht. A-whoooooo's gonna bah me a drank? A-whoooooo's gonna bah me 'nother drank? Whooo's gonna bah me 'nother double drank?'"

"Janis Joplin I loved. I loved her music and since her death I've felt funny and tortured about it. If I'd tried... when I get really sad I cry at home and play that second track off 'I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama'."

He also remembers a pre-Yardbirds Eric Clapton, dragged up to Guy's den and finding Freddie King albums blaring out at him while Guy banged a hammer on the floor and screamed "Play, Eric! Play!" while the young fellow tried to hide in a corner.

He moves on to chaotic Mott The Hoople sessions where studios were reduced to rubble.

"I never hit a microphone. Everything else I destroyed. Why? ANGER! I'm just a very angry person. When a group's been sitting there for two weeks without getting anything done, you've got to... lemme tell you about Hunter. The first time... I love the fact that he came

from a wife and three kids in Archway — changing buses twice — to get to what he thought was some dodgy demo session. He didn't know what it was going to be. The guy at Regent Sound just told him that there was some bloke rambling on about Jerry Lee Lewis and Bob Dylan.

"Ian had a cold and a headache, but he came down and he played 'Like A Rolling Stone' and I stopped him and said, 'That's it. You're hired. Come by the office tomorrow and pick up your fifteen quid with the rest of the band'. He asked what the band was called and I told him Mott The Hoople. He went, 'Whaaaaat? Mott The What?'"

"He came in the next morning and got his fifteen quid, and then he finally believed. I'd organised everything, set it all up. There was no embarrassment. The only thing I'd like to say on my behalf is that I think David Bowie scored most of the credit rather than me. I'd chosen the name, found the band — because they had to be right, I'd auditioned over 70 bands in a year.

"I knew they had to be right, have the right attitude. Then I saw these blokes lugging an organ up the stairs, and they were really lugging this fucking great organ up the stairs. It was enormous, a Hammond C3 the size of a piano, and I thought, 'I don't care what they sound like. They've done it. They got the organ up the stairs'."

"What happened was that I made five great albums for Island with Mott and luckily David Bowie picked up on them. That was great, I was really pleased. He saved their lives.

"The actual incident that happened... you know 'Ballad Of Mott The Hoople'? Well, they disbanded in Zurich, they just said, 'Well, see ya when we get off the train'. Bowie had heard

about this, and he'd based most of his rock thing on Mott, all his rock artistry and all his rock vision. I think if he'd been Ian Hunter, he'd have loved it.

"The real trouble with Ian, though, is that he takes himself so seriously. He takes himself much too seriously."

Today, Guy Stevens says, "I never really recovered from Mott The Hoople." Ask him about the period between 'Brain Capers' (his last Mott album) and 'London Calling' and his reply is simply, "You're asking about a very mixed-up period of my life."

He refocuses. "I never really got over working with Ian Hunter. You've got to realise that... I think Chrysalis Records are doing a great job, signing him up and... the trouble with Ian is really..."

"HE-E-ELLLLPI!" A comic wail of distress masks the real one effectively enough for the conversation not to be derailed.

"Listen, The Clash are really great to work with. I found 'em in '76. I produced demos of the first album, 'White Riot' and 'all that. This character called Bernie Rhodes who owned a garage in Camden Town and happened to live opposite where they rehearsed... I was living near there at the time and I wandered in. They were doing 'White Riot'."

He launches into his own impromptu performance of the song, spittle flying, hair bouncing, eyes bulging. "WHITE RIOT! I WANNA RIOT! WHITE RIOT! A RIOT OF MY OWWWWWNN! And I just thought 'Right! RIOT! RIGHT! RIOT! Let's goooooooh!'"

"And then Bernard got very tricky." The conversation then saunters into the minefield of The Clash's financial history, a topic over which a discreet veil should be drawn. Suffice it to say that anyone thinking that The Clash's popularity and influence has created a proportionate bulge in their bank accounts is suffering from severe delusions. If anyone's "turning rebellion into money", it certainly ain't The Clash.

WHICH IS WHY we find The Clash in a room in a West London office building winding down after a business meeting. The previous day the 'London Calling' video had been shot in the Battersea drizzle, and an evening's rehearsals have just had to be cancelled because their equipment is still waterlogged and as such unfit for immediate use.

Continues page 77

“I saw these blokes lugging this enormous Hammond organ up the stairs and I thought, I don't care what they're like — they got the organ up the stairs!”