ROY WOOD
AUTODISCOGRAPHY

Susan Woodward

Interview by Mike Davies

In the late '60s and early '70s Roy Wood was an indispensable feature of the British record charts—first as guiding force of the Move, then founder of the Electric Light Orchestra and Wizzard, and proprietor of a healthy solo career on the side. In 1973 alone Wood lobbed four singles into the Top 10, half of them going all the way to number one. His rollicking songs—distinguished by bulldozer rhythms and soaring vocals—combined the innocence of pure pop with a knowledgeable, kitchen-sink eclecticism. Whether you loved or hated Wood's high-cholesterol productions, you never forgot them.

His decidedly lower profile in the second half of the '70s, along with the new wave explosion, removed Wood from the forefront of rock activity. The multi-instrumental studio prodigy has never been entirely inactive, however; lately he's organized Helicopters, his first band since Wizzard, and released a couple of singles on British EMI that prove his pop instincts are still intact.

In TP 48 we ran an analytical profile of this talented figure. Now we are pleased to present Roy Wood in his own words.

To 1965
PRE-MOVE

I started out playing harmonica. I used to go to my dad's Working Men's Club and play "Granada" and all that stuff with the piano player but I didn't take anything seriously until I got my first guitar.

The first band I was in was called the Falcons; then I joined Gerry Levene and the Avengers. I did some demos with the Falcons, and the Avengers released a single on Decca called "Dr. Feelgood," but that's going back further than I care to remember. I used to write instrumentals for the Falcons because it was popular to do Shadows-type things, but when the Beatles came along they influenced my songwriting.

Then I joined Mike Sheridan and the Nightriders [later Mike Sheridan's Lot]. I was writing while I was with them but they never took my songs seriously. In those days to get work you had to be a bit of a human jukebox; consequently half my songs didn't get heard. A couple of the lads in the band wanted to do original stuff but it was mostly covers. We decided to record "Make Them Understand" on the B-side of a thing called "Take My Hand" because they could see I was getting restless. It wasn't a particularly good song.

1966-67
THE MOVE
First singles

I was rehearsing with the guys who formed the Move before I left the Nightriders; I gave them notice so they could find someone else before I went. We all used to congregate at the Cedar Club in Birmingham, and all get up onstage and play together. I suppose it got to a point where it was embarrassing for our respective groups because we seemed to enjoy ourselves so much.

The Move's main aim was to do our own material; we wanted to be original for a change. The Who (and the Pretty Things) were a big influence with us; they were the first to be really wild onstage. When we started we were just an ordinary group, playing at the Marquee week after week. We had a small following but then we came up with the idea to be a bit more belligerent—smashing up TVs and setting fire to places—*then* we had people queueing all down the street to see us and musically we hadn't changed much at all. Charlie [singer Carl Wayne] used to go a bit over the top at times and some people got hit by bits of flying telly, but that was their fault for getting too close.

We were going for ages before we got a recording contract. We wanted to make a name for ourselves on the circuit so that more companies would be interested; that was [manager] Tony Secunda's idea. Then he asked me to go into a demo studio and put down some tracks, just me playing guitar. "Night of Fear" [1967] was one of those and we signed to Deram. They had a reputation as a very progressive label, what with Procol Harum and Cat Stevens; the Move was basically a pop band but we'd come in on the crest of the progressive movement. I wasn't writing in any one particular style, I just wrote whatever came out and if they liked it they used it. I didn't go out to change our style when I wrote "Flowers in the Rain"; I think they used that because "flower power" had become popular and they were cashing in.

I actually wanted "Disturbance" [the flip of "Night of Fear"] to be our first A-side; considering that we were getting a name for being rather violent onstage, I think it would have been more shocking to have had that as a single. I thought "Night of Fear" was weak. I used the Tchaikovsky [*1812 Overture*] theme because my parents were classical music fans and I'd grown up with that sort of music at home. I made more of an effort with "I Can Hear the Grass Grow" [1967] after seeing the success of "Night of Fear," which made number two in the charts.

Then we moved to Regal Zonophone. I think it was because Denny Cordell, who produced us at that time, had a big hand in forming the label and he tried to take as many bands that he was producing with him as he could. "Flowers in the Rain" [1967] was the first record played on Radio One [the first national BBC pop channel], which was odd because in many ways the Move was a Jekyll-and-Hyde band: Our live work wasn't really representative of what we did on record. The stage act was a lot heavier.

The B-side of that single, "(Here We Go Round) the Lemon Tree," was also recorded by the Idle Race [home of future bandmate Jeff Lynne]. We were at the old Advision Studios and I

knew the Idle Race wanted to get in to do some recording, so I put in a word with the tape engineer, Eddie Offord (who went on to work with Yes and Pink Floyd). That was the first song I'd had covered. Cliff Bennett did one too ["You're Breaking Me Up," 1968], but it wasn't very good.

For "Flowers in the Rain," Secunda got together with one of his mates, a cartoonist. Tony was a bit of a sensationalist, and there was all this gossip at the time about [then Prime Minister] Harold Wilson and his secretary. He got the cartoonist to do a drawing of Wilson on the bed with her and printed a few as a joke for him and a few of his press friends. A few days later he showed it to Carl, who said "Bloody hell"—because it had the Move's name on it with something like "despicable, depraved...could also be used to describe the Move's latest record."

Charlie told Secunda to check it out, and he took it 'round to a lawyer who said, "No way, forget it, you'll be sued to high heaven." One bright spark posted one to 10 Downing Street and before we knew it the police came to arrest us at a gig and we had to appear at the Old Bailey the next week. We lost all the royalties; I lost more than anybody else because I lost all the writing royalties on both sides. We had to donate them to charity.

1968
"Something Else from the Move" (EP)

We were still playing the Marquee when we made this EP—must have been 1967/68. A lot of the choice of material was down to Carl Wayne. He wanted to record something more representative of our stage act, and my songs really weren't that heavy. We did "It'll Be Me," "Somethin' Else," "Stephanie Knows Who," "Sunshine Help Me" and the Byrds' "So You Wanna Be a Rock 'n' Roll Star." Later we actually topped the bill over the Byrds at the Albert Hall. Gram Parsons was in the band at the time, and he reckoned we did a better version of "Rock 'n' Roll Star" than they did.

1968
"The Move" (LP)

Denny Cordell was quite enthusiastic about "Zing Went the Strings of My Heart." [Move drummer] Bev Bevan's got a great bass voice. He'd been hanging around the studio after drumming, listening to us doing the vocals and doing some backing parts; Denny decided to find him a song that he could sing on his own and "Zing" was it.

"Fire Brigade" had already come out as a single. We were in the middle of recording the album. Carl and Bev (I think) met with Secunda, who said we had to go in the studios and do a single the next day and they didn't come back to tell me I had to write one until nearly midnight; then they came waltzing in with a bottle of whisky and booked me into a separate room to write. I had my Gibson 335 and a bottle of scotch. When they came to get me for breakfast I was still putting the finishing touches on it.

This album was the closest to our singles sound. I think it was largely down to Carl wanting to sing songs that suited his voice. He wanted to prove himself, and he had to adjust to my songs; he wasn't particularly keen on that. Consequently he picked most of the material on our next album, **Shazam**.

At that time I was sort of a background figure. I'd never been up front and I didn't want to be. I was more keen on just being the writer; it would have suited me if I could have done a Brian Wilson, producing and getting a replacement for me in the group. It wasn't until Carl left—when I had no other choice—that I realized I could actually go out and do it.

"Cherry Blossom Clinic" (and "Cherry Blossom Clinic Revisited," on **Shazam**) were about a nut-house basically, but a nice one. That was one of my early songs. When I left art school it was one of my ambitions to write a children's book for adults—fairy stories with strange twists to them. I had a lot of ideas written down and I used them in my songs; this was one of them and "Flowers in the Rain" was another. There was talk of "Cherry Blossom Clinic" being a single but we recorded it before "Fire Brigade" and that was stronger.

1968-69
THE MOVE
Later singles

"Wild Tiger Woman" [1968], which didn't do very well at all, was a definite change of style. I originally wrote the B-side, "Walk upon the Water," as the follow-up to "I Can Hear the Grass Grow." I was a bit worried about "Wild Tiger Woman" coming out as the A-side, but the band said to give it a chance; it didn't pay off. There was some inner politics behind that too; the management had a disagreement with the label, who I don't think promoted it very well. I don't think it was a particularly outrageous song, despite references to bondage and that sort of thing. It was just a bit of poetic license really.

"Blackberry Way" [1968] was a deliberately commercial single to re-establish the band after "Woman." The B-side was written by Dave Morgan; that was Carl getting his own back for not singing on the A-side. He used to manage Dave, so he had us use one of his songs and got quite a slice from it.

Things now started to get a bit strained between some of us, especially Charlie and myself. We put down the backing track to "Blackberry Way" and Charlie refused to sing it, so I said "balls to you" and did it myself. [Bassist Chris] "Ace" Kefford left the band around this time because he couldn't take it. He was a bit highly strung and his nerves used to get the better of him; he and [guitarist] Trevor Burton fought a lot.

We used Jimmy Miller to produce "Blackberry Way" because he was the Rolling Stones' producer and Denny Cordell had split to America. In fact "Wild Tiger Woman" was released as a rough mix because he just sodded off. We only used Miller for this one single because he was a busy man and not available all the time.

"Blackberry Way" was really the first single that changed our style because that was when I started doing demos. Before that I used to just go in the studios and explain what I wanted; it didn't always turn out the way I had in mind. I had just become friendly with Jeff Lynne, who was the first bloke I knew with a sound-on-sound tape recorder. I put down the demo for "Blackberry Way" on his deck, and the single more or less turned out like the demo.

By the time of the next single, "Curly" [1969], we'd changed management. We'd been sold to this guy who managed the Marmalade, and it sort of rubbed off. He wanted to do a "clean up the Move" campaign and he wanted something really poppy. Someone got in touch with Mike Hurst, who was producing Cat Stevens. We put down backing tracks and went to Olympic Studios to mix. I was waiting around all day and he didn't turn up, so I mixed it myself. That's how I got into producing; I did all our records after that. That same day I saw the Stones recording "Honky Tonk Women" in the other studio.

"Curly" wasn't a good follow-up to "Blackberry Way" and it wasn't one of my favorites. Its success [number 12 on the charts] had a lot to do with the fact that we'd just had a number one. "Blackberry Way" was actually at number one when Trevor Burton left. He'd been living in London with Noel Redding and Denny Laine, and they'd been talking about getting a supergroup together with him, Denny, Steve Gibbons and Alan White.

That's when we brought in [bassist] Rick Price, whom I'd known for years. He was the guitarist in Sight and Sound, and accepted the job straight after a Sight and Sound gig. We wanted someone who could sing as well, to take some of the work off my shoulders.

1970
"Shazam" (LP)

Shazam was a difficult album. Rick wanted to do some heavy stuff same as I did, but being the new man he didn't really have much to say. Charlie and I fought over a style and it ended up there wasn't any style on the album at all. It wasn't going in any one direction.

We'd always been promoted as a singles band. At that time to break it as an album band you had to go to America, because people in England didn't buy albums unless they were big fans. We used our albums to do what we couldn't do with singles. A lot of **Shazam** was stuff we'd been doing onstage.

I suppose the band now got a bit more acceptable. Trevor had been a bit outrageous on stage and Rick was more of the John Entwistle type, just standing there being the bass man. Then I got a bit scruffy because I was kicking out at the new manager who had us doing cabaret gigs. Carl Wayne loved it because he could show off his voice, but I became embarrassed about those gigs; groups like us just didn't

do them. I'd walk onstage and get whistled at because of my long hair, so I used to stand at the back—more or less hiding behind my amp—and it became more like Carl Wayne and his backing group.

One day I decided to put my foot down. I started going onstage in tiny black glasses and a chain-mail vest, with my hair all back-combed out. People would stare or whistle and I'd throw things at them.

At one club Charlie came on in a white suit and someone in the audience called him a puff [homosexual]. I'd had just about enough, so I drank down this large vodka and lime on my amp and threw the glass. It hit him straight in the head, but then he and his mates started throwing pint glasses at us; they were waiting for us outside afterwards.

Carl left during that cabaret stint because he thought I was being unprofessional. He went into cabaret and I became more outrageous.

"Brontosaurus" [1970] was very heavy. I wrote that around an image I wanted to portray—which ended up being the Wizzard image. I designed this jacket to look like scaly dinosaur skin. I wrote the song around that. We went on television to do "Brontosaurus"—my first gig as lead singer—and I wanted to do something else visually besides wear the coat. I looked in the dressing-room mirror and thought maybe I'd paint my face to match. I added triangles around the eyes and then back-combed my hair; when the rest of the group came back they couldn't believe we were going onstage like that. I went totally mad, rolling around the floor with my guitar. Rick actually stopped playing; he couldn't believe it. That was the new image from then on. I think our musical transition to heavier rock would have been more difficult without it.

"When Alice Comes Back to the Farm" [1970] didn't exactly set the world alight. Regal Zonophone decided to become Fly Records and it wasn't promoted at all; it got hardly any radio play. After that we switched to Harvest Records [a division of EMI Records].

Jeff Lynne was on the "Brontosaurus" session; he was in London with the Idle Race, came over and I let him play on it. He'd already told the Idle Race he was leaving but had to work out his notice. We did a couple of gigs in the meantime with Black Sabbath; they weren't very successful. Lynne's joining us made a big difference because we now had two songwriters instead of just one, and obviously the muscial influences were going to change a lot. I needed somebody in there who could write, and who I rated as a writer.

1970-71
THE MOVE
Final years

Rick Price had left by the time **Message from the Country** [1971] was released. Jeff and I were planning ELO and we'd stopped touring, but Rick needed work to support his family. He went off with Bob Brady and Mongrel but was still available for any tours that came up. Jeff didn't want to tour. He wasn't into it, really; he was always in the studio. I was thinking more and more about ELO. We'd been talking to EMI about it and they said we could go ahead.

I used oboe on some of the **Message** tracks. I'd been playing oboe since the idea for ELO came about because I wanted to play oboe onstage. I was bored with guitar. On a lot of those tracks I played bass and Jeff played guitar; he took over as lead guitarist for a while.

EMI agreed to pay the recording time for the ELO tracks, but we still had to carry on as the Move as a recording band. To keep on their good side we thought we'd make the singles as commercial as possible—which we did with "Tonight" and "Chinatown" [both 1971]. I enjoyed doing those singles, though; I think "Tonight" is the best we've done. It was very difficult at the time because we were still searching for an identity. If it had been up to Jeff and myself we'd have packed up the Move and formed ELO, we felt that strongly about it; we didn't want to do the Move at all in the end. Bev kept the Move together because he was unsure about the ELO idea to start with. He was a much better business man than Jeff or myself, encouraging us to keep the band together to finance ELO.

"California Man" [1971] ended up being the last Move single, although it was never intended as such. "Tonight" was done at the same time as **Message from the Country** and "Brontosaurus" was done during the making of **Looking On**.

Looking On was the first album I did that wasn't co-written with Jeff but where we wrote half each, more or less. The songs were written for the Move to do live, although our live work had started to dwindle by then. We weren't performing live by the time of "California Man" although we did a lot of television. I didn't really want to carry on with the Move; our ambition was to do an ELO world tour. "California Man" was just an out-and-out rock 'n' roller. If I were to write a rock 'n' roll number today it'd probably be quite similar because that's my style.

1971
ELO

I first had the idea for a rock orchestra when I was working on "Cherry Blossom Clinic." I had loads of ideas for the string parts but I couldn't write out orchestral parts; consequently we used Tony Visconti. I was watching the session musicians in the studio—a lot of them were not being very helpful—and I thought, wouldn't it be great if a band could play all that? If somebody joins a group why does he have to be a guitarist? Why can't he be a cellist or a French horn player?

From then on I was keeping my eyes open for people. It was very difficult because a lot of people that had classical training and were our age either didn't want to travel or had parents who wanted them to join an orchestra. We went through about a half dozen sets of string players before we actually got a couple of blokes.

We did ELO's first album in our spare time, playing everything on it ourselves. That was how I started playing cello. I was out in the studio playing things and Jeff was in the control room getting the sound. A couple of things started out as Move tracks. "10538 Overture" was going to be a Move number; Rick Price even played on that. We finished it after Rick and Bev had gone home. I'd been scraping around on a cello in the hotel room and they'd been complaining about the racket. When they'd gone I went to the control room with the cello and Jeff listened back to the track. I ended up putting on about 10 cello parts. That song was the birth of ELO.

ELO's first gig [April '72] was at the Greyhound in Croydon. I couldn't really tell what some of those early performances were like. We didn't have any guidelines, and there was no proper way of amplifying the instruments. We were buying contact mikes and jamming them down the bridge of the cello, so we had to suffer with feedback and couldn't have the cellos as loud as we would have liked. We had two cellos, a violinist and a French horn and we all wore headphones so we could hear through one earpiece and still hear the band as well. The sound left a bit to be desired.

Audience reactions were weird. The atmosphere used to be amazing because this had never been done before—and we looked a bit odd too. I used to put shoe dye in my beard to make it white and wear a white wig. I wore little black glasses and looked a bit like Old Father Time. I went on in a monk's habit and everyone else followed from there. I'd learned from past experience that what I considered to be good bands had done nothing because they had nothing to offer visually.

I think ELO played too many big venues. If we'd done more small clubs at first we could have got the sound together, but because the halls were big and everybody used to turn up their electric instruments the string players didn't have a chance; nobody could hear what they were playing.

I left ELO partly because attention was being focused on me and not the band as a whole, and partly to save the friendship between Jeff and myself. Lynne and [bassist] Richard Tandy had worked very hard to get the band together; and as soon as we came off stage the press used to click their cameras at me and ask what I thought about this and that. It just wasn't fair, and it got to a point where Jeff didn't speak to me much—and I couldn't stand that. I vowed that after some of the things that had gone wrong in the early days I'd never play in a group with people I didn't get on with. That's basically why I left. The music was fine and I really enjoyed playing it.

1972-73
WIZZARD

I set up Wizzard as soon as I left ELO. The problem with ELO was that it took so long to set up that things leaked out to the press long before we wanted them to; people knew about it 18 months before it happened. I didn't want them to think it took me 18 months to get every band together. I went to see Rick Price and it was almost like Mongrel, really, with Rick and drummers Charlie Grima and Keith Smart. Bill Hunt was leaving ELO to be my keyboard player and cellist Hugh McDowell came as well.

We were recording ELO's second album when I had a row with Jeff and walked out. I was playing bass more than anything else on that album. Lynne insisted that I was playing it wrong on an arrangement; I knew I wasn't, so I said, "Here, you play it yourself." Mongrel were recording at Air Studios just down the road, so I went straight down there and had a chat with them. We decided to get together the following week and within two weeks of my splitting with ELO we were out working.

We had an offer of an amazing gig which we desperately wanted to do, so we got down to rehearsing night and day. Wizzard's first-ever gig was at Wembley Stadium in front of about 40,000 people. We had to use whatever amps were onstage, and some of the rubbish they'd got up there was dreadful. My amp blew up twice and I did something I'd never done before in my life: I took my guitar off and just sang. I don't know what came over me. I must have been drunk. The saxophone players had only been with us two days, so they were reading off music sheets for some of the stuff. So as not to make it obvious they put the sheets on the floor; then the wind started blowing them about and they had to jump in the air to play it.

After the gig we went into the studio and started work on the album **Wizzard's Brew** [1973]. I wrote the songs just before I left ELO. Those were the quickest songs I've ever written, done while I was touring Europe with ELO. I knew I was leaving and the atmosphere wasn't too good between us; since I didn't want to socialize with anyone I sat in my hotel room and wrote.

Since I was going to form a new band I didn't want to do one like ELO. I thought of using brass instead of strings, but on the first few Wizzard dates we did have two cellists, Hugh McDowell and Trevor Smith. For the image I went back to "Brontosaurus" and enlarged on that. Instead of just using black and white I went raving mad and dyed my hair all different colors. I'd always wanted to use two drummers, and I decided to add cellists. I wondered who had used cellos and saxophones together before—I mean that's quite unusual—and then I thought of Phil Spector, upon whom I originally based our sound.

I saw Wizzard as very much a fun band. After earlier traumas I was determined to just go onstage and have a good time, and that rubbed off on the audience.

We'd all hoped to take the band to America but we weren't with the right set-up to do that. "Ballpark Incident" [1972] was written in an American style. That was a bit of an experiment, actually, because I'd never recorded with two drummers before and it took us a while to work out how to do it. Towards the end of Wizzard we did drums separately but at the beginning we all marched into the studio and recorded them together; it was a right row.

Wizzard's B-sides were by other members of the band, largely so they got some money from royalties. We weren't working seven days a week and they needed the cash. "The Carlsberg Special (Pianos Demolished Phone 021 373 4472)" on the flip of "Ballpark" was an instrumental written by Bill Hunt, who's a big lager drinker—Carlsberg Special Brew. The night we recorded that we all got well pissed. Rick put the phone number on for a laugh because onstage Bill used to demolish pianos. It started at the Reading Festival because the piano they'd given us was totally unplayable. We had to tune up onstage; Rick said "Give us an A" and Bill ripped the key out of the piano and threw it at him. I couldn't sing the first two songs for laughing. That was his actual phone number in the title; he was bogged down with calls after that.

"See My Baby Jive" [1973] appeared right after "Ballpark" because we wanted to keep the ball rolling. I think we did it as soon as we finished **Wizzard's Brew**. The single made number one. Rick gave me a kick to come up with something fast so I wrote "Angel Fingers" [1973] and that was another number one. That was sub-titled "A Teen Ballad" and featured "the Bleach Boys" and "the Suedettes" because I think it needed a sense of humor.

Our sound could have been a lot better live. Since money was made from albums, not live performances, we couldn't afford a top class sound man and used to get whoever was with the p.a. company at the time. We had a couple of live reviews that weren't that favorable, as far as the actual sound went. Still, with that line-up I suppose you couldn't expect it. Trying to hear cellos and sax over two drum kits is quite a feat!

Wizzard was very chaotic. We were thumbing our noses at bands who stood onstage doing nothing, just playing for themselves. We used to do the maddest things possible. People in the band cowered in dressing-room corners wondering what I would get them to do. Once Rick had an entire angel's uniform to wear with roller skates.

We had a lot of ideas rejected by the BBC's *Top of the Pops* and there were a lot of things going on you never saw onscreen because the camera would focus elsewhere and miss a juggling or trampoline act. The original idea was for a rock 'n' roll circus; I always wanted to organize the first rock pantomime, with us taking part in a plot. It would have cost a lot, but we couldn't find anyone who was interested. It's the old story that if your records are doing alright the record company doesn't feel the need to do anything different.

1973
SOLO WOOD
"Boulders" (LP)

My solo work was a result of the transition from the Move to ELO. EMI wanted to make sure they had me signed as a solo artist, so [then manager] Don Arden got me signed up for two solo albums and two band albums a year. Consequently I spent a lot of time in the studio. I enjoyed making those solo albums but I would have liked it not to be a contractual thing.

On **Boulders** [1973] I played everything—an entire orchestra. I did "When Gran'ma Plays the Banjo" for contrast; also I'd just acquired a banjo. "All the Way Over the Hill" was more on the English folk side. I wanted to experiment on my own, away from what people expected the group sound to be. I thought I'd have a go at a wide variety of music to find out whether I could do it or not.

"Dear Elaine," a single hit, was written well before "Blackberry Way." I'd recorded it when **Message from the Country** was coming out, but Bev said I shouldn't release a solo album because the Move was more important. **Boulders** was completed a long time before it came out. It felt a bit old when it did get released.

1973-74
WIZZARD/WOOD
Singles

In December, 1973 I had a solo single in the charts ("Forever") and also a Wizzard hit with "I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday." I must have been on the pulse of the time with that, because normally the only Christmas records were by Bing Crosby or people like that. I thought it would be nice for a group to record one, and I didn't think anyone had done one before to that extent. "See My Baby Jive" had sounded a bit Christmasy because of the Spector sleigh bells, so I decided to base it on that sort of sound but write about Christmas and use kids on it. As it happened, that year everybody decided to do one: Slade, Elton John.

"Rock 'n' Roll Winter (Loony's Tune)" was recorded at the same time—a week after the Christmas one—but it took Warners until spring of 1974 to release it. A lot of people wondered what I was doing, and d.j.s didn't like having to announce a winter record when they were trying to get the spring shows together. I added "Sorry, the word 'spring' wouldn't fit" to the label when I found out it was going to be released. It was called "Loony's Tune" because I was living with Lynsey De Paul at the time and the band called her "Loony." I'd changed to Warners from EMI because of Don Arden. I swear I didn't want to leave EMI and I'm glad to be back.

Wizzard toured the States

under UA, whom we were signed to out there at the time. We had a cult following in the States and we'd had regional hits but not national ones. When we went over to tour they didn't have any promotion for us. It was a waste of time, really, but I wanted to go.

"Forever" was part of a contractual obligation but it was something I wanted to do anyway. It wasn't particularly a Wizzard song; I fancied having a go at a Beach Boys sound. The B-side, "Music to Commit Suicide By," featured Rick Price on telephone. Rick was looking after me then; if it hadn't been for him I'd have gone right down the nick because the set-up I was signed to wasn't doing anything. Don Arden wasn't very well liked then; he is now because of his success with ELO. I was always getting sarcastic comments about people having their arms broken and all that. I've got to say that all the time I've known Don Arden I've never seen him do anything violent to anybody, and I've never known anyone he's physically abused. However, he did hang on to my contract although we were both going nowhere.

I was still signed to EMI as a solo artist. Don wanted me to do a few more singles with EMI to fulfill the contract and then put me on Warners, where Wizzard was. That didn't transpire and he ended up forming Jet, buying me off EMI and putting me on that. My last single for EMI, "Going Down the Road" [1974], I did because I'd learned to play bagpipes. I often write songs for instruments I've learned to play.

1974
WIZZARD
"Eddy and the Falcons" (LP)

Eddy and the Falcons [1974] was originally to be a double album with each side in a different style, because there were so many different things the band could play. I thought we could do one side rock 'n' roll, one side classical, another side jazz and the fourth a Rick Price country-rock thing. We did the rock 'n' roll side first and Warners got a little impatient, so we ended up just releasing that. There's still stuff on the shelf that didn't come out.

Both Wizzard albums did better than anything I'd done with the Move; they were both Top 50. On **Eddy and the Falcons** I started writing with engineer Dick Plant. I found myself in a position where I had to get songs finished; lyrics aren't my strongest point and Dick was very good at words. I prefer to work on my own, though.

1974-75
WIZZARD
Decline and fall

"This Is the Story of My Love (Baby)" [1974] wasn't written as a single. It was an album track, but when people began leaving Wizzard around that time because of management problems they released it quick.

Next came "Are You Ready to Rock" [1974]. Then we switched to Jet and put out "Rattlesnake Roll" [1975; the first Wizzard flop] and "Indiana Rainbow" [1975]. "Indiana Rainbow" came out as Roy Wood's Wizzard; Bill Hunt and the cellists had left and [pianist] Bob Brady had come in.

We had another American tour pending. Some of the lads got frustrated with the management, so Bob, being a militant type, said he'd go to the States if they paid him Musician Union rates. Rick stood by him, and so did Keith—not to be spiteful to me but just to kick out at the management. The management told them to piss off.

The Wizzard that was left—Charlie Grima, Rick, saxophonist Mike Burney and myself—recorded the missing **Wizzo** album. The band itself wasn't going to be called "Wizzo"; that was just the album title. Jet still has it but it's never seen the light of day. It's all finished and has some tracks we did for the TV show *Sight & Sound*; "French Perfume" is one. When Jet didn't release the album the band got totally frustrated and packed up.

1977
WIZZO

I was doing some outside production at the time, but only bits and pieces. Annie Haslam's **Annie in Wonderland** [1978] was the first album I'd really done as a producer. I think it was a good showcase for Annie's voice; we tried to get as many styles as possible, to get away from the Renaissance thing. It's the sort of album that could stand up in ten years' time, but I'm sad it wasn't promoted. It was just thrown away.

I also did some stuff with a punk band called the Suburban Studs and I went to Renaissance sessions, but I never actually put myself out as a producer as such because I was a bit confused as to just what my role was supposed to be. I didn't know whether or not to lock myself away in the studio and wait for the contract to run out; I decided "no" because I wanted to play, so I formed Wizzo.

I got great pleasure out of Wizzo because it got me playing a bit of jazz. It also did me good as a writer because I learned more about chord progressions. The record and management companies couldn't see it, though, and they didn't want to know; they told me to come back when I'd written a pop song.

I really wanted to do a fusion of jazz and rock. If we could have afforded to take it out on the road we could have cleaned up, because the people making jazz-rock records then were all at the jazz end of it—never the other way around. I don't think the media took me that seriously. Because of all the chopping and changing that had gone on before, they thought I was just off on another wild idea which wasn't going to work.

Around 1977 I left Jet for Warners. Jet had let a couple of singles escape—"Indiana Rainbow" and the solo "Looking Through the Eyes of a Fool" [1975]—but not much else. Don said I could leave the label if I went to Warners and that must have been during the making of **Super Active Wizzo**. I had a lot of recording problems because of an injunction; let's just say that some tracks were done under duress.

The first thing I had out with Warners was "The Stroll" [1977]; then came the Wizzo album and that was that. **Super Active Wizzo** was very percussion-influenced because I'd gotten into playing drums from the **Mustard** solo album [1975], recorded just before Wizzard split up. I'd always liked a heavy John Bonham sound. Drummer Dave Donovan played in that style and I concentrated on his sound.

Warners didn't like the Wizzo band. They didn't like the jazz thing. But I couldn't say, "OK, lads, they don't like jazz, we're finished," so we carried on rehearsing. We didn't do any gigs apart from the *Sight & Sound* show. Wizzo went on for some time without doing anything, except me doing some producing. I think it fell apart when Rick left because he couldn't afford to hang on any longer. When he went it went down the drain; it was pretty pointless going on.

1979
SOLO WOOD
"On the Road Again" (LP)

I then switched to Automatic Records. I'd met Nick Mobbs when I was at Harvest. He seemed to know what he was doing and Warners wasn't particularly interested; my contract was with Warners America, so English Warners shed their responsibility. Since Nick was going through Warners with Automatic, I could stay with them and yet be on Nick's label, which would save a lot of legal problems.

We went to Rockfield Studios and made **On the Road Again** [1979]. The only person left from the Wizzo line-up was [keyboard player/guitarist] Paul Robbins. Pete Mackie came in on bass; he'd played with Paul before in Fable, and we seemed to get on well. Dave Donovan subsequently got elbowed because he was getting up everybody's nose, which left the three of us and saxophonist Billy Paul who'd also been on the Wizzo album.

We took the finished album to Nick Mobbs, who'd become the business man now he'd got his own company. Since my contract was with Warners, he didn't always have full say. Rather than getting the album out and working on it, he became too critical. He played the album to himself every day in his office and to his friends; it got to the point where he thought it was wrong, and that made me question myself. I got really keyed up over it.

Mobbs said they'd release the album if I changed three tracks that he didn't like. Two of them were jazzy things I'd written

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ROY WOOD/From page 37

with the Wizzo band, one of which I particularly wanted to do. Still, we changed the tracks and he still didn't release the album. The only way we got it released was when Richard Battle [Wood's personal assistant] and I went to the States for a bit of a holiday and went up to Warners. They decided to release it there but it never came out in England. Nick did release the title track as a picture disc; Warners had put out "Keep Your Hands on the Wheel" and "Dancin' at the Rainbow's End" before we added them to the album.

"Keep Your Hands on the Wheels" had John Bonham playing on it. That was done at Rockfield Studios in Wales. Led Zeppelin was rehearsing at Clearwell Castle, not far away, and they were looking for somewhere to record. They came around to look at the studios, found I was there and we all had a bit of a laugh. I mentioned that we hadn't got a drummer—I was playing drums—and since John said he was bored with rehearsals I asked him to have a bash on one of the tracks. He said he'd be down the next day and he was; he came with Robert Plant and played like a demon. He was my favorite musician of all time.

Carl Wayne did vocals on that track. I'd produced some tracks for him with Jet (which they didn't release). He'd come down because he wanted me to do some more, and when the backing vocals came up—well, you can't get a finer voice.

1980 SOLO/ HELICOPTERS

After **On the Road Again** I produced a Darts album and a couple of singles for them. I also produced a single for a band called P45 on Jet, and "Love Job" by the Paranoids. I was working at the Old Smithy in Worcestershire and I got to talking to the guy who runs it about doing some of my own stuff, even though I didn't know what was going to happen to it. I didn't have a manager; my accountant had been looking after me. Recording deals were difficult to get. Companies were just getting over the new wave, and had a load of punk bands on their roster with nothing happening to them. I didn't feel the time was right to have myself hawked around to every label; it wouldn't look professional, for a start. My accountant said to do a "one-off" so people could see I'd got a record out and was doing something. I recorded "Rock City" and put it out on Cheapskate [1980]. I was very lucky because a club called Rock City had just opened up in Nottingham, and they adopted it as their theme music. Also, at the time I was doing radio promotion on it Radio One was doing a week in Birmingham, so I got involved with that.

Things seemed to be going my way after three years of feeling I'd been knocking my head against a brick wall. I've always known what direction I wanted to go in and aimed for it, but I got involved with so many people who confused me that I ended up not knowing what to write or what sort of band to form. That's why I went into production—to cool off.

It was through sheer exasperation that "Rock City" got played on Radio One. Cheapskate had just stuck it out and wasn't doing anything on it. Richard and I were on our way up to Edinburgh for an interview when the car broke down. We managed to get back to Birmingham, where the Radio One team was doing something with all the d.j.s at the Top Rank Club. Now I've never done this before because I'm not pushy, and I felt it was a bit cheeky—but I thought "sod it" and went in, and they were really pleased to see me. I went backstage, went to a party afterwards and got chatting, and the record got played. Simon Bates invited me to his show the following day; I played live, a bit of classical guitar and some bagpipes. It was great.

Helicopters came about because Jon Camp [bassist for Renaissance] and myself had always thought about forming a band. I'd been working with Paul Robbins anyway as engineer; when Renaissance broke up and Jon became free we decided to do it there and then. We don't have a permanent drummer.

"Ring Out the Old, Bring in the New" [1980] was just me and some kids. I haven't recorded Helicopters yet as a band. If we do an album I will, but for the singles I'll keep it down to just Paul and myself doing any extra bits we might need. We found that we work a lot quicker with just two people. When we did **On the Road Again** we had a lot of people hanging about with nothing to do.

We actually recorded a live album at the Marquee for Cheapskate—Colin Newman advised us to do that—but we'll shelve that until we start having some success and maybe bring it out with EMI. It was great to get back on the road because I'd got all that pent-up energy from all the years I'd been locked in studios or in the house writing. I've only been onstage with Helicopters a few times and I haven't gotten comfortable yet, but a lot of that's down to finances.

We're doing some old Move and Wizzard numbers. Initially I wasn't going to. I was just going to do "California Man," "I Can Hear the Grass Grow" and one other, but Jon had sessions, Mike Deacon [keyboard player from Darts] had things to do and rehearsal time got cut down. The easiest thing to do was for me to make cassettes of stuff I'd done before that everybody could learn at home, then get together for a couple of days. We have more old songs than I'd intended but I suppose people would get disappointed if they came to see me and we didn't play them. "Blackberry Way," "See My Baby Jive" and "California Man" probably go down the best.

1981 SOLO WOOD
This year's model

I wanted to record "Aerial Pictures" a long time ago, when I first wrote it, but EMI wanted "Green Glass Windows" as a first single; it might be a follow-up or make a good title track for a Helicopters album. The EMI deal is for two singles. If they take up the option it'll be for another two, and then they'll put themselves in for an album. So the band will be off the road for a bit while I'm in the studio getting tracks together.

I want to get out to America. I formed the band with that intention, but you can't go unless you've got some product and that depends on what happens with us here. Maybe I'll get to play with Cheap Trick again and do two versions of "California Man" in one night. ■