RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

You Don't Have to Say You Love Me
Simon Napier-Bell

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YOU DON'T HAVE TO SAY YOU LOVE ME

SIMON NAPIER-BELL

PREFACE

This book was first published in 1983. Looking at it now, I find plenty that is embarrassing. Like a rock singer listening to an earlier album, part of me wants to hide it away, while another part of me can see the vibrancy and fun of it. Both in content and in style, *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me* is not as I would write it today, but rather than try to correct or change it, I feel it's best to let it stand as a period piece.

In 1983 it got a pretty mixed reception. The music press at the time were a serious bunch and they didn't like the flippancy with which I treated the industry. On the other hand, journalists from the tabloid press recognised good stories when they saw them and loved the book. Most other people seemed to have realised it was just meant to be fun.

To launch the book I had a party at the notorious sixties disco, The Scotch of St James, in Hans Place, London. Five hundred people were coming, but when I went to look at the club I found it only held a hundred. In the end we used it to serve the food and had the party outside in Hans Place, one of London's more secluded squares. We were in luck – the weather was perfect; it was a balmy hot summer's night and the turnout was phenomenal. From seven to eleven people drank, danced and ogled a couple who got too hot, then ripped off their clothes and got even hotter.

Afterwards I had a late-night dinner at Langan's and tottered back home at one am. As I left the taxi, Connie, my publicist, predicted confidently, 'Darling, unless someone shoots the Pope, your party's going to be on the front page of every tabloid.'

At six in the morning, eager to make sure the launch of my book had gone well, I walked round to the newsagent to buy all the papers. There, blaring from the front page of every one of them, was the story, ‘Pope is shot.’

But I was lucky. The party had had sufficient impact to be held over to the following day and in the end we made most of the tabloids. Whether it helped sales of the book or not, I don’t know, but the first edition quickly sold out. Afterwards I bought the rights back from the original publishers and republished it the way I wanted it, with more photographs – fifty pictures, many of them classics. When that edition sold out, I did nothing further with the book and it remained out of print.

This latest edition is the result of friends urging me to put it back into circulation and of Jake Lingwood at Ebury Press wanting to do just that. It includes two previously unpublished chapters. One of them was left out because it dealt with a period before I became a pop manager; the other because it was about sex, and my first publisher urged me to be discreet. In re-publishing the book, it seemed best to put it together as it was originally written.

Simon Napier-Bell
May 1998

INTRODUCTION

STORIES FROM THE SWINGING SIXTIES

These short stories are about the sixties, when the rock industry was just emerging and none of us knew too much about what we were doing.

The book ends up with me retiring from the music business in 1970. After that I travelled round the world for six years but by 1976 it all seemed a bit *déjà vu.* Choosing a new country to fly off to was beginning to get as confusingly dull as deciding where to eat in Alice Springs. So the music business reclaimed me, as it does most people who try to leave it.

On the surface, things seemed a bit different. The vitality of the sixties had disappeared. People were more cautious, more analytical, more aware of rock music as an industry. The music press saw groups in socio-political terms rather than simply musical ones. And even the groups themselves tended to be overwhelmed by the social problems of the moment.

But things soon changed again. And now, the politically concerned 'working-class' groups of the late seventies have turned out decidedly 'middle-class' in their aspirations. With their first taste of success they forget about showbiz. Beneath the surface, it's the same old grab-all-you-can-get music business, with the underlying excitement still coming from the 'big deal'. But since the success rate of big deals is relatively small, they're more usually thought of as 'big rip-offs'.

The big rip-off is the music industry's main excitement. And whether it's a record producer selling a master for twenty thousand pounds or a major record corporation licensing their product worldwide for fifty million, the big deal is always likely to end up as the big rip-off. Because no matter what is agreed in writing at the time of the deal, everyone is always dependent on the artist: the fickle, sensitive, unpredictable rock artist holed away in his fifteen-bedroom mansion in the country, obsessed with sex or drugs or Buddhism, and holding up a multi-million dollar industry till he's in the right mood to be creative.

The people in need of his artistic output will probably call him selfish or amateurish, and they're probably right. But then, the music industry as a whole has always been largely self-seeking and unprofessional. People often ask about the money it generates: 'How much is there?' they ask. 'And where does it all go to?'

Well, it's true that there's quite a lot around. An album might generate as much as a dollar a copy for the artist. And an album might sell two million copies, even five or six. So that's five, or six million dollars for the artist, and you can be sure the record company makes even more.

Songwriters make a fair bit as well, both from record sales and from performance royalties on the radio. In the States that might be one hundred and fifty dollars each time the song is played, and if the record crosses the boundaries of musical style and can be described as rock *and* soul, not to mention easy listening, then it might make the playlists on four or five thousand radio stations throughout the country.' If it's played six to ten times a day, seven days a week for a month, you don't have to be a great mathematician to see millions of dollars staring you in the face wherever you look. Take gigs, for instance. Think of the money if you play to a hundred thousand people in a stadium at ten dollars a head, every night for a

sixty-day tour. And if you're big enough: why not go on a hundred-day tour and play twice a night?

Most of this money gets divided up and given out in the correct manner. But anywhere you find big money, you also find big crooks. Thieves, thugs, con-men, swindlers, embezzlers and even murderers. But most of all, in the music business you find large numbers of happy-go-lucky hustlers, out to make an easy living. For despite all the changes since the sixties, the music business is still the 'go-to-bed-late, get-up-late, don't-give-a-fuck, do-as-you-please-and-still-make-a-fortune' business.

Simon Napier-Bell
Paris, 1982

PART ONE

THE SCENE

CHAPTER ONE

SWINGING LONDON

London didn't start swinging as soon as it hit the sixties. In fact, London didn't even know it was swinging till some overseas journalists turned up some time in the middle of the decade and told us what was going on.

Swinging sounded like a fun thing to be doing so we all started to have a go at it; it didn't seem too hard. You just found out where the swinging was meant to be taking place (you could read that in *Time* magazine or *Der Spiegel*), and you headed off down there. Then, settled in a corner of the Ad Lib club or The Scotch of St James, you drank until you were blind drunk or, if it still wasn't three o'clock in the morning, you could try downing even more. Doing this night after night, you naturally tended to commit a variety of indiscretions, and the more adventurous of these acts were referred to as 'swinging'. The combined total of everyone's indiscretions was known as 'Swinging London'.

At that time I had my own film company, which produced documentaries and TV commercials, but I was getting bored with it. Swinging seemed like a good alternative. And apart from the hang-over in the mornings it was very enjoyable.

Sometime around 1965 (with all that alcohol swilling around it was difficult to know what year it actually was), I met Vicki Wickham. She was in charge of booking all the acts on *Ready Steady Go*, the pop TV programme that served as High Church to the Swinging London cult. We became good friends, and she said I ought to get into the music business. I agreed it sounded like a good idea, but

what did I have to do? She said she wasn't sure, but probably not much.

A few days later she phoned me and said, 'Here's your chance. Dusty Springfield wants some lyrics.'

I hadn't actually written lyrics before but it sounded easy enough. I came up with a few while on the phone, but Vicki said they'd have to be fitted to a melody. Dusty had picked up an Italian song at the San Remo Music Festival and wanted to record it in English, so she'd suggested to Vicki, 'Why don't you and Simon write the lyrics?'

An ordinary day in Swinging London was based around a good dinner; this would start at around nine pm and run on till midnight. Then it was a quick drive to the Ad Lib, The Scotch of St James or The Cromwellian for some heavy drinking. The evening Vicki phoned me there wasn't time to work on the lyrics before dinner, but if we rushed the brandy and got to the Ad Lib half an hour later than usual, we might just fit in some work between the two.

So after we'd finished our crêpes Suzettes, we took half an hour out of the evening and drove back to Vicki's flat, where we sat listening to a scratchy old acetate singing at us in Italian.

I said, 'It's from Italy. The words have got to be romantic. It ought to start off "I love you".'

Vicki shuddered at the thought. 'How about, "I don't love you"?' she suggested.

I thought that was a bit extreme.

"No, it's going too far the other way. Why not, "You don't love *me*"?'

That was more dramatic, more Italian, but a bit accusatory. So we softened it a little: '*You* don't *have* to love me'.

But that didn't quite fit the melody, so we added two more words: "YOU don't HAVE to SAY you love me'.

Great. That was it. We could do the rest in the taxi.

When we got to the Ad Lib club the song was all but finished, yet we only arrived ten minutes later than usual. Even so, I remember telling Vicki, ‘I don’t like this lyric-writing business; it messes up the evening.’

‘In that case, why don’t you get yourself a group to manage?’ she said.

I thought about that for a few days and then had a good idea. My film company had auditioned some girl singers for a TV commercial and the best one had been a pretty West Indian girl called Diane. The TV commercial was never made, but on one of those unfortunate Swinging London evenings the girl had been, and it was leading to complications.

There was another source of awkwardness in my life, a small, pale, seventeen-year-old young man called Nicky. He kept phoning me up and coming to my office saying I’d promised him something or other. I don’t quite know what it could have been, nor why I should have promised it, but it did seem likely that it was the result of yet another Swinging London evening.

My idea was to put the two problems together and make these two my first recording stars.

I bundled them off to the studio to make a romantic little record of the ‘I love you – you love me’ variety. Then I had some classy black-and-white pictures of them blown up unnecessarily large and sent my secretary to the post office with two hundred oversized envelopes. The next morning at seven, every radio and TV producer in the country was woken up by the postman.

‘Sorry, guv. I couldn’t get it through the hole.’

I’d been warned that record promotion was a tough job, so I’d planned my strategy. One of the victims of Swinging London’s new enlightened attitudes was supposed to have been colour prejudice – but it wasn’t quite dead yet. I used this to my advantage. The same people who’d been woken by the postman were phoned by me an hour or so later.

‘Have you listened to that record yet? Great, isn’t it? When are you going to play it on your show?’

They hesitated. ‘Well … er … there do seem to be rather a lot of records about just at the moment, and …’

I interrupted. ‘Listen you, you’re prejudiced, aren’t you? You know quite well the song’s a smash. It’s just because she’s black and he’s white, isn’t it? If you don’t play that record I’m going to call *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* and tell them the whole story. You’re a bloody racist.’

It was very crude but it worked. Radio and television producers were proud of their liberal credentials. I hit the jackpot. Out of seven possible television shows, I got six. And as for the radio stations, it was a clean sweep.

The record was a flop of course. But at the end of two months Diane and Nicky were well-known, and so was I.

The Yardbirds called me up. ‘Are you Simon Napier-Bell, the chap who did that fantastic promotion on Diane and Nicky? Would you like to manage us?’

There were four rock groups in the world that really counted for anything and The Yardbirds was one of them. When I took them over I knew nothing about managing a group and almost nothing about pop or rock music. But suddenly I was among the most important people in the music business.

It seemed like quite an easy job. There was a booking agent who was called up by promoters who wanted to present the group. The agent said yes or no according to the group’s schedule and then quoted a price. (In those days a top group got up to five hundred pounds for a performance.) Then there’d be a road manager who organised transporting the group to the gig and make sure their equipment was set up and working. There wasn’t much left for the manager to do but sign the contracts.

I took twenty per cent of four hundred pounds a gig, which came to eighty pounds each time. There seemed to be an average of six gigs a week, so that was nearly five hundred pounds. It took all of a minute a day, and suddenly there was so much money coming in that I had to take up eating lunch as well as dinner.

But then I began to discover the bad bits.

The group came to me and said, 'We need houses.'

'Houses?'

Yes, houses. We've got nowhere to live. Our last manager never gave us any money and we want a house each.'

It was more pleading than demanding, but it was a bit of a nuisance because I had a busy schedule of drinking and eating to maintain. However, I found time to pop down to EMI records and tell them I'd decided their contract was no longer valid, and The Yardbirds were off to look for a nicer one elsewhere.

EMI weren't very happy about it, but I told them that twenty thousand pounds would be enough to change my mind. And though nowadays that would hardly pay for a year's supply of roadies' hamburgers, at that time it was the largest advance ever paid or even thought of by a British record company. Anyway, you only had to add up the number of records The Yardbirds sold throughout the world to see that the record company would get their money back in a year or so.

EMI didn't usually think like that, but this time they had no choice. A week later the money came through and I took my twenty per cent and booked up a few months' good eating. The group took the rest and rushed off to waste it on houses.

They were soon back again.

'It's time we made a single. What shall we do?'

So much thinking, it was wearing me out!

I didn't know anything about rock music, so I went and bought copies of their three previous hits and came to the

sensible conclusion that their new record should combine bits of all the elements contained in the previous three. They seemed to agree that this was sound advice so I booked a studio.

It was rather interesting being a record producer. The group set up their instruments in the studio and then they fiddled around working out the right rhythm. After a while they said they had it.

Meanwhile, the engineer had been playing around adjusting the sound, and now and again he asked me what I thought. I wanted to keep him happy so mostly I said it sounded rather nice, but sometimes, just to keep him on his toes, I said I wasn't sure.

The sound and rhythm having been decided on, the group finally played for a bit, and then the bass player, Paul Samwell-Smith, said we had a great backing track. He was co-producing with me so I took his word for it and asked, 'What next?'

'Vocals' was the answer, but unfortunately they couldn't think of any. I said that since pop records were hardly works of great intellect there was really no point in straining one's brain in the making of them. I suggested that they sing a chorus of complete rubbish: 'Over, under, sideways, down, backwards, forwards, square and round'. Then I went for a cup of tea.

When I came back they'd done it and it sounded quite jolly. But somehow I felt I hadn't contributed very much to the production, so I suggested it might be rather fun if they shouted 'hey' once or twice at the start of the song. They seemed very respectful of my opinions. They went in the vocal booth and shouted 'hey' all over the place, and that was that.

When the engineer had mixed the record he sent a copy to my office. I listened to it and reckoned I must be a pretty good producer. Then Vicki called me up and said, '"You

Don’t Have to Say You Love Me” has gone in the Top Ten.’ So I decided I was a pretty good songwriter, too!

I wasn’t so sure about my abilities as a manager. But when the record I’d made with The Yardbirds leapt into the charts and You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me’ went to number one, all sorts of people started calling me up and asking for interviews. I was the new behind-the-scenes celebrity, the man who’d moved in on the music business. Brian Epstein had tired everybody with his stories of The Beatles, and Andrew Loog Oldham, The Rolling Stones’ manager, was going through one of his unfriendly periods, but I was as nice as pie. So they all came to see me.

To start with, I tried telling them the truth: ‘Oh, it was nothing. It just sort of happened.’

But they said, ‘Not at all. It couldn’t be like that. Don’t be so modest. Tell us how you *actually* managed to smash your way right to the top of such a tough business.’

They wanted to hear it so I made it up. I told them how to analyse musical trends, how to choose the right artists, how to create the right image and do the right deals. A load of pretentious rubbish.

‘And what about “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me”?’ they asked. ‘Were you deliberately trying to suggest that nowadays romance is old-fashioned, that sex is OK without any of the old pretences?’

I hadn’t thought about it till they asked me but it sounded pretty good, so I said, ‘Sure. Cut out all the bullshit and get on with the fun.’

‘My God,’ they told me, ‘you’ve summed up the sixties.’ And they ran back to their offices and wrote down everything I’d said. The *Financial Times* gave me an article, Maureen Cleave gave me a page in the *Evening Standard*, Jonathan Aitken gave me a chapter in his book, and then Rediffusion gave me a whole TV programme. But, of course, when they started following me round all day with a

camera, catching me off my guard, or drunk, stoned, or bad-tempered, they began to get quite near the truth.

I knew next to nothing about rock groups or the music business. I'd just been lucky, and I had a good line in chat.

In the programme they put it more gently. They said, 'He's really rather glib.'

Well, that's as maybe. But Simon Napier-Glib was having one hell of a good time.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PINK-HEADED PENIS

In 1957, the day after my eighteenth birthday, I sold my collection of jazz records and bought a ticket to Canada. My only ambition was to be a great jazz trumpeter and that meant living in America. Getting into the US was next to impossible, but Canada welcomed British immigrants and it seemed like the next best thing.

I arrived, trumpet in hand, ready to blow my way on the top, but I hadn’t reckoned with the American Federation of Musicians. They said I had to be resident for one year before I could join them.

For a week I hung around jazz clubs in Toronto wondering what to do. Then a black waiter at the corner coffee shop told me about Little Lord Leroy, a rhythm ’n’ blues singer with a roadshow of twenty musicians and dancers who toured the club circuit of Eastern Canada.

‘Leroy lives in Montreal,’ he told me. ‘The union ain’t so fussy up there, an’ that cat’s always lookin’ for new young horn players.’

I mentioned it to a friend, but he fell over laughing.

‘That’s a black band, they won’t take white guys. And besides … Little Lord Leroy! Well man, you wouldn’t last five minutes.’

Because I was English I saw no reason to abide by North America’s racial manners, so I said I was going to see Lord Leroy and ask for a job.

My friend said, ‘Rather you than me,’ and gave me a hefty wink which I took to be a despicable show of racial prejudice.

I took the Greyhound bus to Montreal, checked into a rooming house and managed to get Little Lord Leroy's address from the Musicians' Union. He had a large ranch-house outside of town. I dressed as nicely as I could and made my way there on a series of buses that took me two hours longer than I'd reckoned, getting me there at about nine in the evening.

I walked up the driveway, combed my hair in the reflection of a car window and pressed the bell on his pink and gold-leafed front door.

It opened to reveal a slender black man with the body of a teenage athlete and the collapsing face of a melting waxwork. He was dressed head to foot in purple. Purple shirt, cravat, sweater, bracelet, slacks, socks and boots. When he saw me he raised his hands to his hair like a slow-motion shampoo commercial and said, 'Well, for heaven's sake, sugar pie, who are *you*?' Then, without waiting for an answer, he added, 'But that don't matter anyways. Jus' come on in.'

He allowed me to squeeze tightly past him, closed the door and patted my bottom in the direction of the staircase. 'It's upstairs, baby.'

At the top there was a room the size of a school gymnasium, magnificently decorated like a Moorish palace. Jazz was playing loudly, the air was thick with sweet smoke, and about a dozen people, all of them black, sat around in groups.

Purple shouted out to them, 'Hey, you all, look what's just arrived. Ain't any of you bad black girls gonna make a claim?'

More quietly he said to me, 'What's your name, white boy?'

I avoided his eyes, looked at the floor and mumbled, 'Well, I came here 'cos I thought there might be a job with Lord Leroy's band.'

‘Oh I se-e-e-e!’ Purple gurgled with sudden comprehension. He raised his voice again, ‘Shit man, this kid’s lookin’ to play with Lee’s band. Does anyone know where Lee is?’

There was an elegant young man perched on top of a ladder painting a frieze of all-male, all-black angels round the ceiling. He said, ‘I think he’s upstairs tryin’ out some kid right now.’

Purple told me, ‘That’s Carmen Miranda. She designs all of Leroy’s stage outfits. The things she can do with a paintbrush …’

He rolled his eyes by way of illustration and I quickly shifted my gaze elsewhere.

In a corner, two men dressed in leather were deeply engrossed in the studs of each other’s jackets. By the fireplace, another couple were lying half undressed on a white rug, sharing a cigarette and large portions of each other. In front of a tinted mirror, three girls were practising some sort of dance. And sitting on a settee by the door were two neatly dressed young men holding instrument cases.

Purple said, ‘Those cats came first. You gonna have to wait a while.’

‘No, it’s all right thanks, I think I’ll come back tomorrow.’

‘Aw, come on, baby, give it a try. Let me fix you a drink.’

He took me firmly by the arm and led me across to the bar.

‘OK, sugar, what you gonna have?’

I asked for a beer. He gave me one and looked for a glass. But I was eager to show my antipathy to delicate behaviour. I clenched the can in my fist and rammed it against my mouth so that it dribbled a bit over my chin, which I wiped dry with an aggressive backhand swipe.

It had completely the wrong effect. Purple opened his eyes wide with admiration and said, ‘Wow, we is mucho