

2. Ann Grootjans, July 31, 2014

A few days ago I mentioned how Robin's exhilarating duet with Valeriya would be the perfect single for the German market to precede an album release. Not that there is a shortage of potential singles here, but in my opinion some tracks are just more powerful or commercial than others that are great "album" tracks, and it may be wise too to take regional differences in radio formats into account.

Robin recorded a bunch of songs in 2007-2008 for an album he wanted to call 50 St Catherine's Drive, which is the address of the house in the Isle of Man where the Gibb family lived when Robin and Maurice were born. When Robin first decided he wanted to record a new solo set he had originally a more orchestral approach in mind and had asked Tolga Kashif to produce the set. Sorting the business arrangements with Kashif's people proved long and difficult and as Robin was itching to get to work I suggested he'd get in touch with Peter John Vettese. PJV had produced four fantastic songs with Robin for the last Bee Gees studio album so it seemed a bit of a no brainer. Robin and Pete eventually recorded 17 tracks in Pete's studio in London. The result was a low-budget but highly listenable set of pop, rock and dance tracks, including some of Robin's strongest songs since his Bee Gees days, with his instantly identifiable, heavenly croon taking the spotlight. The set's most radio-friendly song, and in my opinion the main contender for a first UK/US single release, is definitely "I Am The World". This is a new Beatle-esque take on one of Robin's earliest released songs, in fact, as the B-side of "Spicks & Specks" this was the first time Robin's voice could be heard outside of Australia. For the new version Robin slightly altered the song's lyrics, and, the result is a simple but most efficient, -dare I say perfect- pop record. Surely no one who would hear this beautiful, beautiful voice coming out of a radio set singing the words "true love is one thing I've been dreaming of " would not be moved to tears? For the same reason I think that "I Am The World" should be the opening track of a cd release. "Alan Freeman Days" which was one of the first songs Robin and Pete recorded in 2007 had featured on a somewhat obscure digital release by the British songwriting academy in May of that year, but didn't chart as no airplay and promotion had been in place following a mix-up about the release date. This is an awesome record and was also a big success and fan favourite at Robin's live shows. It's also one of a number of tracks on Catherine's Drive that in my opinion show Robin's merits as a lyricist and absolutely deserves a second chance as a single release, especially in the UK and down-under.

This is what Robin had to say about the song back in 2007: "I wrote this song in memory of the late DJ Alan 'Fluff' Freeman, a pioneer broadcaster of British popular music dating back to the days of the Beatles. Alan Freeman's contribution to the exposure of British records and taking chances with new acts and new sounds gave credence to the British invasion of music in the American market and world market in the mid 60's. Alan was a good friend and he contributed greatly to The Bee Gees' British and worldwide success, having been a big promoter of our first records, as well as my 1969 solo hit Saved By the Bell. I am proud to sing about Alan." Another Beatle-esque or should I say Paul Mc Cartney-esque recording that would do nicely on UK radio I think would be "911". "911" is a short straight verse - chorus tune driven by a clear, tingly electric guitar riff and Robin's heartfelt vocals. This song's lyric line "it was my personal 911" is - as many Gibb fans know - how Robin felt about losing his twin brother Maurice. However, chances that this track is included on an album release may be slim as the people that were hired to release the set are opposed to it. Even when Robin was still alive there was already some controversy surrounding this recording, with Robin fervently defending its inclusion/release. Robin claimed artistic freedom of expression and would in discussions refer to "New York Mining Disaster 1941" having been released on single back in 1967, even though that could be perceived as controversial too. One of a number of ethical issues maybe involving the release of the post-humous set? One of the ballads from the sessions, "Days of Wine and Roses", I recall was much favoured by one of Warner music UK's executives when he first heard the song during a visit to one of the recording sessions at Pete's studio. It's a strong, traditional sounding mid-tempo ballad with powerful vocals and fitting melancholic lyrics, and would be a good follow-up single for the UK market with its Celtic lilt hinting at Robin's Manx background. That same Celtic sound may render this track unfit however for the radio formats on the European continent. The ballad of choice for European airwaves would surely have to be "All We Have Is Now". Of all the tracks from the Catherine's Drive sessions this is the one that's the most reminiscent of the Bee Gees, actually I think it could have been a Bee Gees song! Dreamy Synth pop sound, and what a good song and lyrics! "Instant Love" may do well too, particularly in Germany. It's a little bit "dark" maybe but look at how popular Depeche Mode are in Germany, and they have had some really dark-sounding hit singles. The chorus is pretty irresistible and I love the shift in vocals Robin uses here. A second version of this track was recorded

at a later date adding vocals by RJ, so which of the two versions will see the light of day, or maybe both, I can't tell ...

A. G.