

MONDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2022

Alistair Griffin has today announced plans to release a collection of songs on 20<sup>th</sup> May of this year, both digitally and on CD, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of Robin Gibb's passing.

Alistair first came to the attention of Bee Gees' fans in 2003 when Robin was a judge on the BBC's *Fame Academy*. Whilst one judge in particular was less than complimentary to Alistair for the duration of the competition, Robin championed him throughout, regularly praising his voice and delivery. Indeed, so impressed was Robin by the North Yorkshireman's natural talent that upon conclusion of the competition he invited Alistair to duet with him on a re-recording of "My Lover's Prayer".



(edited still from the "My Lover's Prayer" video)

In an interview with *The Teesside Gazette* Alistair recalled how the very day after the *Fame Academy* final, he was whisked to the BBC's Maida Vale studios in London to record The Bee Gees' song. "I got an early call in my hotel room saying Robin wanted to do it as a duet and could I get to the studio. It was such a whirlwind, the whole thing. To be sat in a studio, recording a song with Robin Gibb, it was very surreal." The single would go on to become a no. 5 hit in the UK, and then Robin further demonstrated his faith in Alistair's singing and song-writing talents by arranging for Alistair to become his support act on the *Magnet* tour in 2004.

Alistair was even invited to play cricket for The Bunburys, with the occasion being made all the more memorable after being approached by Mike Gatting who told him, "Lovely voice, can't believe you didn't win!"

But the *Fame Academy* and *Magnet* tour experiences weren't Alistair's first exposure to the music of The Bee Gees by any means. "The interesting thing is that I was aware of who they were through my parents, but actually I had a sort of moment of my own in 1993 when I first heard "For Whom The Bell Tolls" and I absolutely loved that song. I was a bit more grown up, I'd just have turned 16, and that was my entry into researching The Bees Gees, buying the back catalogue, their Greatest Hits, all manner of things, but I just loved that song. I remember watching it on *Top Of The Pops* and I was actually willing it to be the Christmas UK no. 1 as I thought it was such a great song." [note that "For Whom The Bell Tolls" only ended up at no. 4, just behind Chaka Demus & Pliers with Take That at no. 2 with the Xmas top spot going to Mr. Blobby].

At the moment Alistair is re-visiting his Bee Gees collection before deciding on the songs he will be covering in the forthcoming release. There will be a mixture of acoustic and orchestral versions, but current candidates include "I Started A Joke", "Massachusetts", "I've Gotta Get A Message To You", "How Deep Is Your Love", "Saved By The Bell" and a new recording of "My Lover's Prayer".

But the undoubted highlight will be a previously unreleased song "Forever Today" jointly written by Robin & Alistair in early 2005, and for the first time Alistair now tells the full story behind this very special composition in an exclusive interview with GSI:



(image courtesy of Alistair Griffin)

GSI : So Alistair, how did the idea for you to write a song with Robin first come about?

AG : I was doing some work for *Next*, the clothing company, and the chairman David Jones was one of the financial backers for a film called *These Foolish Things*. He arranged for me to meet with the director, a lady called Julia Taylor-Stanley. It was she who asked me to write a song, but also

knowing that I had worked with Robin, she proposed the idea that we could co-write the song together and that it would be a special thing. So I then went back to Robin and his manager and asked them what they thought, at the same time thinking that The Bee Gees have written some of the most memorable music soundtracks of all time, so I'm also thinking he might turn the idea down on that basis. But obviously I was delighted when he agreed that we could co-write a song for this film.

GSI : And this was intended for the end credits, right?

AG : Yes, it wasn't to be the title music, as they thought that the end credits one would be the song they would use to promote the film, so we had to reflect some of the themes already in the completed film.

GSI : On the day you were due to go to The Prebendal to write the song with Robin, were you in any way anxious about the prospect or had your previous interactions with Robin prepared you for this?

AG : I was a little bit nervous. Obviously I was excited and had already worked with Robin on "My Lover's Prayer", and we had spent quite a bit of time together doing that song and in radio & TV studios, but it's obviously different when you come to write a song together. I already knew a lot about The Bee Gees and the massive catalogue of the many songs they've written, both for themselves and other artists, so I suppose I was of the view that I'm just this guy at the start of my career and now I'm going to write with a legend, so obviously I wanted to deliver the goods as it were in terms of my writing.

GSI : When you arrived at The Prebendal whom did you meet?

AG : I remember meeting Dwina just after being distracted by what looked like a gypsy caravan in the garden, and she welcomed me in and I'm sure that on the way to see Robin I also saw suit of armour! And then Robin was in the room where he does his music, and we sat down and had a cup of tea with Ken Graydon who had picked me up at the railway station and driven me there, and also with Michael Graves who was Robin's musical arranger at that time.

GSI : Can you please describe the setting, and what kind of equipment Robin had at his disposal

AG : There's a wonderful photo on the internet which was taken just a few months before my visit, which shows exactly what Robin looked like at that time, as well as the keyboards he used at this session. (the photo Alistair refers to cannot be re-produced on this site, but it can be viewed here <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/bee-gee-robin-gibb-poses-for-a-photoshoot-at-his-home-in-news-photo/53031714?adppopup=true>). There was a little mixer, and a couple of keyboards probably just for writing purposes – you would have a classic key piano and another for adding strings so that you can mix and blend the sounds – it's actually quite similar to the keyboard set-up that I have right now to be honest. It was kind of strange, having all this modern recording equipment in such an old setting, but I think what struck me most was that I that I'm someone who's just on their way as a writer, and then sitting on Robin's mantelpiece – he had like three Ivor Novello awards which is the pinnacle of songwriting, and a couple of Grammys – and all of a sudden I'm sat there thinking I really have to put my best foot forward. It was added pressure, but sometimes that's a good thing.

GSI : How did the actual writing part begin, as presumably it can be slightly awkward at the start especially if you are collaborating with someone for the very first time?

AG : Well, we'd already watched the film separately in advance, and they'd given us a bit of a brief which summed up the mood of the film and the main theme was about loss – a theatre director was falling in love with a girl in his play, but then World War Two intervenes, he goes away and never comes back – so that's the love story followed by the tragic end, and based on that concept Robin had the idea of a title being about them having one more day together which he then extrapolated to "Forever Today". Robin then came up with the melody for the chorus, and then I worked the

verses around that. When you write a song you often refer to the key part of it which is the chorus, so previously when I've referred to this particular song I always generalised that it was Robin who wrote the music. And that's really how collaborative song-writing starts.....you've got nothing in front of you, and then someone comes up with a chorus or a title and you work back from there. In this case we probably got as far as we probably needed to get in terms of the melody, and then like you often do we got stuck, and agreed at that point to go away and think about it again. So I went away and finished the lyrics and made the demo, but we never really did get the chance to refine them because we got the word from Julia that they were going to go down a different route for the end-credits.

GSI : Michael Graves is also credited for "Forever Today" – what was the nature of his role?

AG : It's hard to sort of describe. Although he's a composer and arranger in his own right, on that particular occasion he was primarily there as a mixing engineer, but also to assist Robin with any complex keyboard arrangements, and he would have probably made the occasional chord suggestions. So once you have invited someone to give ideas and they are in the room for the entire session, then obviously they're going to be getting a credit.

GSI : When you were writing the remaining lyrics, did you draw your inspiration for them from personal experience or imagined events?

AG : That's quite a difficult one to explain, but when Robin came up with the title "Forever Today" and explained his thinking behind it about having more time with someone you've lost, a perfect day together, it struck a chord. I'd spent quite a lot of time with Robin during 2004 working on "My Lover's Prayer" and sat in on many interviews where he was asked about losing his brother. Though he never said it, both myself and Michael Graves wondered if he may be drawing a parallel with the film's story and his own recent loss. When I set about finishing the lyrics we'd started, consciously or maybe unconsciously I think that's where the words took me. The best songs distill the feeling and emotion that's in you into words and music. I think that's what happened with "Forever Today".

GSI : Thank-you Alistair for being so forthcoming about this, and that seems a nice way to conclude this interview.

From talking with Alistair it's abundantly clear just how important an influence Robin was in his life, and how there was genuine affection between them. The day after Robin died following his long battle with bowel cancer, Alistair was interviewed by *The Teesside Gazette* where he took the opportunity to make the following heartfelt tribute. "The music world has lost one of its greats. I'll never forget the backing I got from Robin, it was a huge boost to get support from him - he was my lifeline in Fame Academy, really, when maybe some others weren't as enthusiastic. It was great to get encouragement from a guy who had sold millions of records and had done it all in terms of music."

"It was a great time - possibly the best memories of my music career, and considering he was one of The Bee Gees, he was a very humble performer. He was incredibly generous, whether in the recording studio, doing an interview or performing on stage. He never worried that anyone might be treading on his toes. He was very kind. You see these programmes where artists say 'I'd buy your record' or 'I'll record with you' but Robin followed through on that.

"I feel very lucky to have been championed by him and to have shared a record and a stage with him. It was a hell of an experience. He was a music legend but above all, he was a kind, generous spirited man. It's really sad that he's gone."



(image courtesy of Andrew Môn Hughes)

Some Bee Gees fans may have already heard the 2005 demo version of "Forever Today" which Alistair posted as a lyric video on Facebook in December 2020, with a few also being aware of an acoustic version that Alistair performed in one of his regular live home podcasts that also appear on that site. But the exciting news is that Alistair intends to completely re-record "Forever Today" so that it finally becomes the completed version that both he and Robin originally intended it to be. As an additional bonus, the CD release will also feature an instrumental version of "Forever Today" which won't be available for digital download.

Note that the CD will be a limited release with the final quantity to be determined by advance orders, so if you wish to guarantee that you will be able to obtain what is sure to become a collector's item, then keep an eye on this site as confirmed content and order information will follow within the next couple of weeks.

**Finally, a personal appeal from Alistair who has precious few photos of himself together with Robin and is looking for a suitable one to use on the rear cover of the CD. So if by any chance you have one in excellent quality (perhaps you were near the front of the stage at one of Robin's German concerts in 2004 and were able to get a good shot of the two of them during "My Lover's Prayer"?) then please send this (or a high resolution scan) for consideration to [bgcollector@mail.com](mailto:bgcollector@mail.com). No images will be used without final permission of the owner, with full credit being given.**