

A pop star in the mid-60s, Paul Jones then became an actor for some ten years but in his heart he always held a fondness for the music of the blues, both as a singer and as a harmonica player. In 1979, he formed The Blues Band and, in 1986, he began presenting *The Blues Show* on BBC Radio 2 – it's his harmonica on the show's theme tune.

Now, after singing the blues for over sixty years, Paul has curated a compilation of twenty-one tracks, each one either written or co-written by him, called simply *The Blues*. The album was released via Umbrella Music on 30 September. These songs look back on his career with Manfred Mann, The Blues Band and also his solo work. Before talking with Paul about the album, I wanted to find out more about his background in relation to the music.

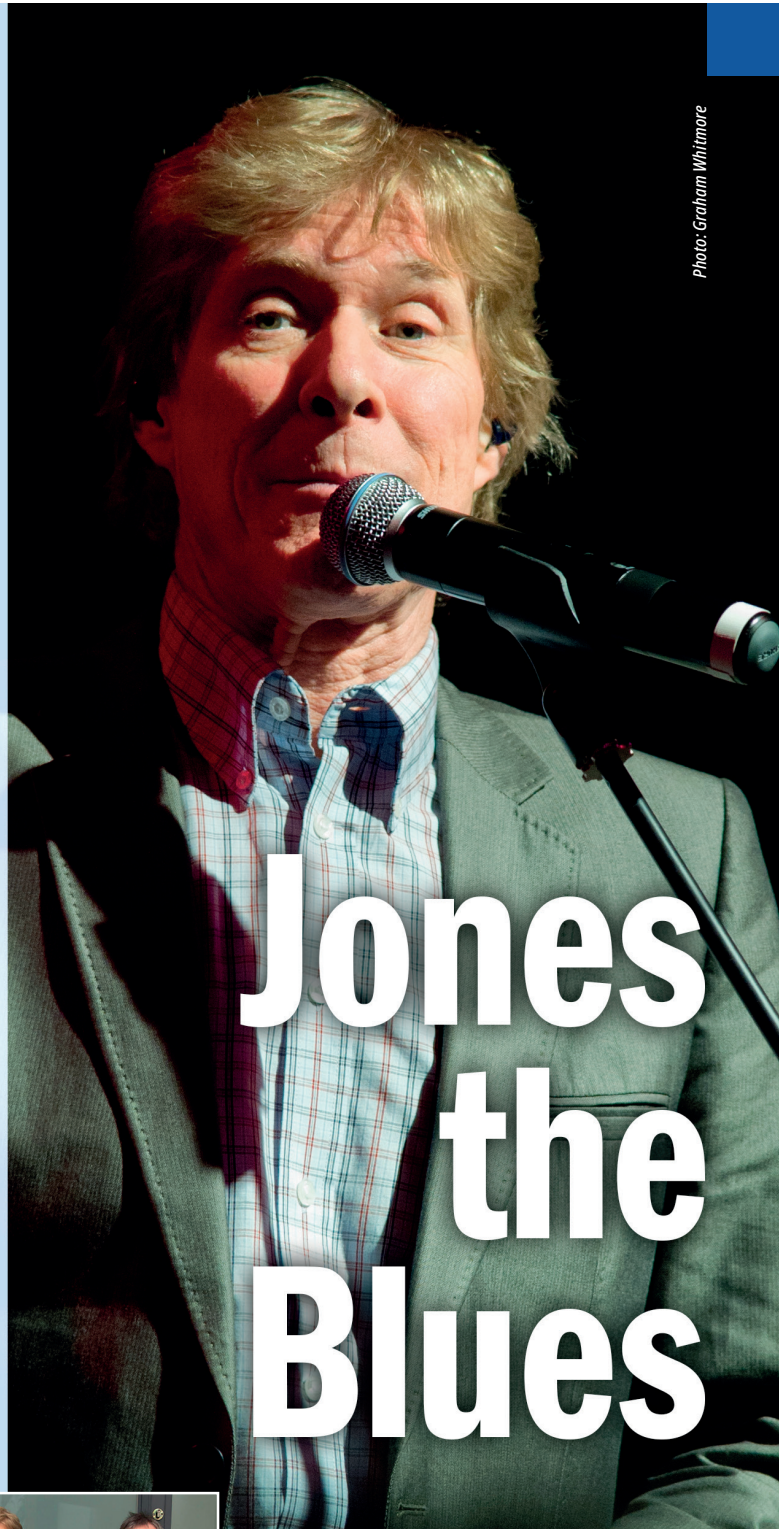
Paul has very clear recollections of his time in the 60s, which goes against the often-repeated line, 'if you remember the 60s then you weren't really there'. He really was there, mixing with musicians whose names are now famous – Alexis Korner, Eric Clapton, Brian Jones and Manfred Mann to name just four. He came from a musical family – his mother played piano and his father played the violin. He and his brother were expected to sing and he joined the local cathedral choir.

"I sang some wonderful music and learned a little bit about music [itself]," he tells me. "Then I heard blues... it was Jimmy Rushing singing with The Count Basie Orchestra, or perhaps Big Bill Broonzy playing on his guitar. Jimmy Witherspoon was wonderful – he was one of the people Chris Barber brought over to this country in the late 50s, early 60s. Chris enabled British people to hear Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and Sonny Boy Williamson."

At the age of nineteen, after his first term at university, he went home for Christmas to Plymouth where he discovered Pete Russell's Hot Record Store. Paul remembers thinking, "...It must be full of American music, so I'm going.' I used to buy bits and pieces and then one day I was in there and Pete Russell said, 'You like blues. Tell me what you think of this?'

"He put this ten-inch LP on for me. It was T-Bone Walker, a Texan guitar player, and one of the most influential guitar players in the history of the blues. He was a massive influence on B.B. King and people like that. T-Bone was a wonderful singer, very relaxed. He was quite a gentleman in a quiet way and also an unbelievable entertainer. My favourite photograph of him is playing the guitar behind his head, wearing white tie and tails, and doing the splits."

I ask Paul what was special to him about this record? He



Jones the Blues

The voice of British blues thanks to his weekly BBC radio show, which ran from 1986 to 2018, Tom Povey hears from Paul Jones and reflects on a music career that's spanned six decades



The Blues Band, from left: Tom McGuinness, Dave Kelly, Paul Jones, Rob Townsend, Gary Fletcher

explains: "It was recorded for Atlantic Records and they persuaded T-Bone to record at least part of it in Chicago. He usually recorded in Los Angeles with jazz musicians but they put him in Chicago with a bunch of blues musicians. On one track, there was a harmonica player called Junior Wells.

"He's not generally spoken of in the same breath as Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson, Big Walter [Walter Horton], but he's immediately behind them and some of his records exceed some of theirs. He played on a couple of tracks on that album and there's one called 'Play On Little Girl'. I thought, 'T-Bone I love, but Junior I am going to copy.'"

Paul never went back to university but found various jobs so that he could begin to develop a career in music. While staying initially in Oxford he mixed with the growing music scene in London. He bought a harmonica but at first he couldn't work out how to play like Junior Wells.

"One day Brian Jones said to me, 'You're doing that all wrong. What key is that harmonica in?' I said 'C'. He said, 'And what key are you playing it in?' I said 'C'. 'That's where you're going wrong. If you want to play the blues on a C harmonica, you have to play in the key of G.' It was like he'd just opened the door to a magic garden. It's what's called cross harp."

Paul had no formal training with the harmonica. He would listen to records from players such as Little Walter and Lazy Lester and then write down the key of the harmonica on the back of the LP together with the key it was played in. He found a job singing with a band that was all jazz musicians, playing for dancing, and they let him play occasional pieces on the harmonica, which helped him to progress.

He then became known for singing and playing harmonica with The Alexis Korner Band. When Manfred Mann and Mike Hugg were looking for a singer to front their blues band, they were told to go and see Paul with Alexis Korner at the Marquee Club. Paul joined The Mann-Hugg Blues Brothers in 1962 and started to use the harmonica as a signature instrument for their sound. The band was at heart a jazz and blues band until their record company renamed them Manfred Mann and they began to make hit records.

Paul left the Manfred Mann band in 1965 and then in 1966 he got a call from Joe Boyd who knew that Paul was well connected with the British blues scene. Elektra Records in the USA wanted to release a compilation album showing that 'white boys can play the blues'.

They had already recorded tracks with US groups The Lovin' Spoonful, Al Kooper and The Paul Butterfield Blues Band and had asked Joe to find a white British blues group.

Joe asked Paul to put a recording group together, which led to Jack Bruce (from Manfred Mann) on bass, Ben Palmer (a friend from Oxford) on piano, Eric Clapton on guitar, vocalist Steve Winwood and drummer Pete York (from The Spencer Davis Group) joining Paul on harmonica in the studio. I ask Paul to tell me more about how that group of musicians came together.

Paul says he rang Jack first, who agreed straight away and then asked, "Who else are you thinking of getting?" Paul replied, "It would be great to get Eric; what do you think?" Jack responded, "We could try." Paul then added, "What about getting Ginger Baker on drums?" Jack's answer came as a surprise: "How much do you know?" Jack then explained that he, Eric and Ginger were planning to form a new group and they were already in rehearsal but it was a complete secret.

Paul did ask Eric who agreed immediately but when Jack spoke with Ginger the reply was, "That's a really bad idea for us three to appear in some other outfit, given what we are about to do. I'm not doing it." So the band, billed as Eric Clapton And The Powerhouse, recorded just three numbers on the Elektra compilation album *What's Shakin'* and Eric, Jack and Ginger formed the first British rock supergroup, Cream.

Both Eric Clapton and Jack Bruce play on Paul's compilation album *The Blues*. On it, there are seven tracks from his time with Manfred Mann, seven with The Blues Band, and seven of his own with guest musicians. Each of the tracks has a story behind it and Paul has written brief liner notes for the album. I wanted to dig a bit deeper into some of these stories because some choices may surprise you.

The 60s hit '5-4-3-2-1' is on the album. It was recorded in December 1963 by the Manfred Mann band and used as the signature tune for the then-new TV show *Ready Steady Go!* It became a hit and rose to Number Four in the *NME* chart. I ask Paul, "Is this blues?" His answer: "Just listen to the first twenty-four bars of it. It's a blues. It does do the odd thing that conventional blues doesn't do but Manfred always did things like that."

He then talks about another track, 'I'm Your Kingpin', which was recorded in March 1964. "It is blues but it leaves out four bars of what is normally regarded as twelve-bar blues so it's

actually an eight-bar. But hey, I'm not arguing!" In the liner notes for the album Paul writes, 'Manfred had a knack of coming up with chord sequences that were "sort of blues" but unconventional.' 'I'm Your Kingpin' features solos by Mike Hugg on vibraphone, Mike Vickers on saxophone, Manfred on piano, and Paul on harmonica.

There is a breadth of styles on *The Blues* that comes from the wide variety of influences on his music. Paul explains: "I started listening to the light classical music of my parents. Then some older boys at school suggested I might like jazz so I started listening to that and quickly converted to jazz. Then it was folk blues and Chicago blues and it became soul blues and funk blues. There's one track on the album that's heavily influenced by James Brown." That track is 'You've Got To Take It', which was recorded in 1963 with the Manfred Mann band.

Another track is 'The Dog Presides'. The title refers to Nipper, the HMV dog that featured in an oil painting which hung in the EMI studio where they were recording, and the track includes Paul McCartney on drums. I ask how he got Paul McCartney to play drums for him?

"That was Peter Asher whose sister Jane was Paul McCartney's girlfriend at that time. Peter was producing my records and I'd written this song, 'The Dog Presides' – it's a blues. There was a Bee Gees song on the A-side. Peter had booked the musicians for the recording. He got Jeff Beck on guitar, Paul Samwell-Smith on bass and Paul McCartney on drums. Actually Paul was a drummer before he was a guitar player." Indeed one of the earliest photographs of Paul McCartney at home in Liverpool shows him with a drum kit. On the film recordings of the *Let It Be* album, put together by Peter Jackson, you can see Paul sitting very comfortably behind a drum kit.

I was very taken by the album's 'Choose Or Cop Out' whose lyrics are very philosophical. The recording, featuring Eric Clapton on guitar, comes from Paul's 2009 solo album entitled *Starting All Over Again*, which was his first solo album for thirty-eight years. Paul explains how he wrote the song: "I read a book by Allen B. Clark who was a GI in Vietnam who lost both his legs, not suddenly but gradually. He was taken back to hospital in the USA. The doctors said, 'We can't save this leg but we might be able to save the other one.'"

"He argued with them because he didn't want to lose his legs but he lost both of them in the end and got prosthetic legs. He is an amazing man

and works in charities raising money for people. Over the years, from time to time, he [Allen Clark] decided to get taller. So he got his prosthetic legs made longer. From about five-foot nine inches, he stopped when he got just over six feet tall. He's that kind of guy. He spends his life now looking for people he can help, and I thought, "That's a song."

Paul quotes a line in the song: 'Mr. Here, got all four limbs he was born with/Mr. There lost two along the way/Mr. Two's always seeking who he may encourage/Mr. Four has his hand out every day.' He explains, "It's really a song about dealing with the hand you've been dealt. There is a line comes in towards the end of the song: 'You have been dealt a hand but you can play it any way you see'. All of that song came from reading the book *Wounded Soldier, Healing Warrior*. Eric Bibb once told me, 'I read books all the time. I get songs out of books.'"

I ask Paul how the blues scene in the UK had changed over the last six decades. "Enormously," he laughs. "The blues scene in the late 50s and early 60s was primarily thought of as a subsidiary of the jazz scene. Rock was out! Now the blues scene is a division of the rock scene and jazz is out. I feel much less at home now than I did in 1960. Apart from anything else, one's ears suffer more."

"Also what I think has suffered is the song, which is something that has happened in all sorts of areas of popular music. The accompaniment always used to be subservient to the song. Nowadays, for many people, the song is simply a carriage for the ego trips of whatever the musicians, producers and sound engineers do."



The week before talking with Paul, I had watched the final performance by The Blues Band at Wallingford BunkFest. As well as Paul Jones the band also includes Tom McGuinness. Aware that Paul and Tom had played together in Manfred Mann, I ask how they met. Paul explains that while living in Oxford in the very early 60s, he met Ben Palmer, a pianist who also played the cornet and they would get together and play some blues. They wanted to put a band together so they placed an advertisement on the back page of the weekly music magazine *Melody Maker*: 'Singer and pianist are both looking for a band to join to play blues'.

They received one reply, saying, 'I'm a guitarist and haven't got a band so if we get together we may eventually form a band.' That was Tom McGuinness. So Tom came over to Oxford [from south-west London] and they jammed together. Tom was already friendly with Eric Clapton and they all used to get together in the upstairs room of a pub in Colliers Wood where they could rehearse if it wasn't being used for a gig. Tom, Ben and Eric got a drummer and another singer, to form The Roosters, while Paul stayed in his job with the dance band because "It paid a living wage."

Then, in 1963, when the Manfred Mann band needed a new bass player, Paul rang Tom who, although he'd never played bass before, didn't have another job at the time. So Paul arranged for Tom to meet Manfred and Mike Hugg and Tom got the job. Later, in 1965, when Mike Vickers left the band, Tom moved to his real instrument, the guitar, and Jack Bruce joined on bass.

Paul left Manfred Mann in 1965 and then reunited with Tom in 1979 when they formed The Blues Band. Later, in 1991, the original members of Manfred Mann re-formed for Tom's fiftieth birthday, without founder Manfred Mann, and decided to start touring again as The Manfreds.

Paul says he prefers live music and performing to recording, which perhaps helps to explain why he has only made three solo albums since 1969 (*Crucifix In A Horseshoe* in 1972,

Starting All Over in 2009 and *Suddenly I Like It* in 2015). He has also been invited to play harmonica on many tracks for others and has recorded albums with both The Blues Band and The Manfreds. But appearing and performing live has always been his favoured occupation.

He toured with The Blues Band following their formation in 1979 until September 2022 and with The Manfreds, who are continuing this autumn with their Hits, Jazz And Blues tour around the UK, since 1991. He also appears occasionally with John Etheridge (from Soft Machine) and with Denny Ilett and his Big Band. "It was because of Denny that I did three nights at Ronnie Scott's over last New Year."

While he is perhaps best known for his music, Paul Jones has had quite a varied career. He starred in the film *Privilege* in 1967 alongside model Jean Shrimpton, appeared in other films, and on TV as a presenter. He's appeared on the stage in musicals, in Shakespeare and other plays, including at the National Theatre and a year on Broadway. Even during his time as an actor, he was often invited to play harmonica on other people's recordings. He presented *The Blues Show* on BBC Radio 2 for thirty-two years and is president of HarmonicaUK. Paul and his wife Fiona converted to Christianity in the mid-80s and they continue to attend speaking events to tell their story.

From both our conversation and watching him on stage with The Blues Band, it became clear to me that Paul Jones is a consummate performer with an infectious enthusiasm for blues music, and for the many and varied musicians he has met and played with over a career spanning six decades. ♦



Paul Jones and Tom McGuinness, mid-60s

