



Mr Showbiz

The Biography of
ROBERT STIGWOOD

'A great book on the first genuine Aussie impresario who was a true leader and a visionary.'

Michael Gudinski AM

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About the Book

In the 1970s, Australian entrepreneur Robert Stigwood was the entertainment industry's most powerful tycoon. This is his larger-than-life story.

Stiggy's ability to pick and promote talent was astounding. He came to renown managing the careers of the Bee Gees, Cream and Eric Clapton. He produced films including *Gallipoli*, *Saturday Night Fever*, *Tommy* and *Grease*, and was behind the massive West End and Broadway musicals *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

There were also great crashes, including an infamous Chuck Berry tour that failed to attract audiences and forced the Australian impresario into bankruptcy. The failure of the big-budget musical film of the Beatles' album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* also cut deep.

Throughout it all, Stigwood lived it up with champagne, staff, private planes, yachts and luxury penthouses. The parties he hosted were legendary, as was his ability to party all night long and pull off a substantial business deal the next morning. Great rifts arose in almost all of his closest personal and professional relationships, but his gift for friendship and enormous talents in the entertainment business generally saw rapprochement. Not for nothing was Robert Stigwood dubbed 'Mr Showbiz'.



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Mr
Showbiz

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VINTAGE BOOKS
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Preface

WHO WAS THIS man who created the soundtrack to my life? Robert Stigwood was known by many names. To friends, family, partners, clients, employees and acquaintances he was variously Bob, Uncle Bob, Rob, Robbie, Robert, Stigboot, Stiggy, Stiggy-Poo, Mr Stickweed, and even Rabbi Stigfeldt. To business adversaries or disgruntled former friends, he was Stigwood. To *Newsweek* he was ‘the Ziegfeld of the disco era’. The *New York Times* once described him as a cross between fictional wealthy playboy Jay Gatsby, high-flying movie producer Mike Todd and legendary showman P. T. Barnum. In his later, reclusive years, Stigwood was likened to film producer and newspaper magnate Howard Hughes. Yet he was different, very different, from all these iconic figures of earlier eras.

There has never previously been a biography of Stigwood. Attempts by journalists and former associates to briefly tell his life story in articles and their autobiographies have either been inaccurate or described one face of the multi-faceted diamond that was Robert Stigwood. Many people have told me many stories about Stigwood, and about their involvement with him. Most had nothing but good things to say.

‘I want Robert to be recognised for his contribution,’ said one such confidant who was particularly close to him.

Another colleague was furious because the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences failed to recognise Stigwood, producer of groundbreaking hit movies including *Saturday Night Fever*, *Grease*, *Tommy* and *Evita*, in its In Memoriam section during the 88th Academy Awards presentation in February 2016.

One or two other informants were less enamoured with the mogul. ‘I didn’t like Stigwood, but I didn’t hate him, either,’ said a businessman who worked closely with him. ‘I just want the full story to come out.’

That is what I have set out to document. Of course, only the subject himself could tell the complete story. Stigwood knew several years ago that I was researching and writing this book, but declined to be involved.

Notoriously secretive about his private life, he succeeded in keeping a lid on it while he was alive. Yet, within days of Stigwood passing away in January 2016, people from his world wanted to talk about him, his achievements and his secrets.

If Stiggy had written his autobiography, how truthful would he have been? The little he revealed about his family and himself during his lifetime frequently dripped with exaggeration or was just outright untrue. Being one of the world's greatest spruikers in the music, theatre and film industries, he would probably have told a story with enormous flair, an equal amount of hyperbole and a minimum of honesty. As I have come to learn, there is much he did not want revealed and went to great lengths to hide; a case of forgery and a fascinating secret thirty-six-year relationship among them. If I am to be an honest biographer, the whole story must come out.

There is so much to tell. Of unshakable self-belief and astounding powers of persuasion; a rise from failure to success so great it even surprised Stigwood; a royal lifestyle; and an astonishing appetite for fun.

So, curtain up, and let the Stigwood show begin ...

ACT ONE

The Rise and Fall of a Bloke Called Bob

1.

Jesus Christ, a Superstar!

‘Jesus and Judas both kissed me!’

Joanne Stigwood

ON THIS NIGHT, it would all begin, or it would all end. This was one of the biggest showbiz parties that New York City had ever seen. Some said the biggest. A century earlier, two hundred sheep had sheltered in a sheepfold on this spot in Central Park. It was Tuesday 12 October, 1971, and a thousand people had packed the ostentatious Tavern on the Green for the glitzy after party following Robert Stigwood’s greatest gamble to date, the controversial Broadway premiere of the rock musical *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

The entire cast was at the Tavern, along with composer Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyricist Tim Rice, mixing with the famous and the fatuous. Stigwood’s British business partner David Land had chartered an aircraft to bring 200 guests from London – British investors in the production, known as ‘angels’ in the theatre, as well as UK theatre critics and gossip columnists and numerous friends and relatives of the composer and lyricist. Tim Rice, who himself had arrived in New York with his aristocratic partner Prudence de Casembroot days earlier aboard a trans-Atlantic ocean liner, was hosting his parents, brothers and an eighty-year-old grandmother who had never before been to America.

‘Didn’t I tell you!’ exclaimed a beaming Robert Stigwood to Rice, shouting to be heard above the din of hundreds of conversations. The thirty-seven-year-old producer’s long fair hair curled over ears and collar. Resplendent in a dinner suit and floppy bow tie, with a Hawaiian flower lei hanging incongruously around his neck, Stigwood put his hands on the lyricist’s shoulders as he sat at a table with Rice family members. Bending

low to be heard, he said, 'The opening night of opening nights, the party of parties! What do you think?'

Rice was in a daze. This was the biggest thing that had ever happened to the twenty-six-year-old. It was overwhelming. 'Frankly,' he says of this night, 'I didn't know what I thought.' The premiere at Broadway's Mark Hellinger Theatre on West 51st Street earlier in the evening had left him stunned. He wasn't sure he liked what he'd seen. Neither had some of the first newspaper reviewers to have their assessments published of this daring, in-your-face show. And now, here was Rice, in the middle of this crazy extravaganza of an after party.

There were one or two famous faces in the crowd Rice vaguely recognised: playwright Tennessee Williams, theatre and movie director Otto Preminger and pop artist Andy Warhol among them, all enjoying the party to end all parties, whose cost accounted for ten per cent of *Jesus Christ Superstar's* budget. As for most of the others, their identities were a mystery to Rice, although some were clearly celebrities in the eyes of fawning fellow Americans.

Stigwood moved on to the next table, joining a group of star-struck Australians, Stigwood family members. Most had flown to New York City from Adelaide the previous week at Stigwood's expense. Front and centre was his nineteen-year-old half-sister Claire. Like Tim Rice, Claire was in a daze, but for different reasons. She had married South Australian stockman John Conrick in August, and this trip was Robert's wedding present to the couple. He'd also flown in his other half-sister Heather, his father Gordon, his elder brother Bill, plus Bill's wife Judith and children Ron and Joanne. From London, Stigwood had brought his mother Gwen. She'd been living with Robert for the past two years, and, like former husband Gordon, had brought a friend to New York to share Robert's largesse.

At the Stigwood table, Robert seated himself between his mother and his bespectacled sixteen-year-old nephew Ron, who could have been taken for Stigwood's son. This party was all a bit much for Ron. He bore the startled look of a deer caught in headlights.

'Did you see the topless girl?' young bride Claire called across the table. 'And the man in the lace see-through suit with nothing on underneath?' Grinning, she added, 'When young Ronald saw the girl with no top to her dress, I thought we'd never get him away.'

As the others laughed, Ron blushed.

His grandmother Gwen hadn't been daunted by the room full of the rich, the glamorous, the outrageous. She told of how, earlier, she had steered Ron's eleven-year-old sister Joanne around the room to meet people, especially the musical's cast, beneath the glow of Baccarat crystal chandeliers. 'We were meeting a lot of celebrities and way-outs,' she said.

'I'm never going to wash my face again,' declared Joanne. 'Jesus and Judas both kissed me!'

Their host threw back his head and roared with laughter. Beside him, his mother jabbed him in the ribs. Reminding her son that the show was contracted to go to the Adelaide Festival the following year, she said, with a wink, 'I've seen so much of the play now, Robert, I'm about ready to understudy one of the parts for Adelaide.'

'Well,' he came back, grinning impishly, 'there's only the lepers left, mother.'

Again the table erupted in laughter.

Glass of wine in hand, Stigwood glanced towards another nearby table. Andrew Lloyd Webber, hair straggling down to his shoulders, returned his gaze, stony-faced, failing to acknowledge his producer when he raised his glass to him. Lloyd Webber was not a happy young composer. For weeks, the slight, nervy, twenty-three-year-old had been predicting disaster, and he was convinced he was witnessing the theatrical equivalent of the maiden voyage of the *Titanic*. 'It was the worst night of my life,' he says today.

Stigwood returned his attention to his own table as party guests came to shake his hand and clap him on the back. Smiling, laughing, Stigwood accepted the congratulations of Bill Paley, head of American TV network CBS. But despite his outward ebullience, the Australian producer was inwardly tense. He'd invested all his physical, mental and emotional capital in this Broadway premiere of a controversial British musical about the last seven days of Christ, a show which had yet to be staged in Britain. He'd hired one of Broadway's largest theatres. He'd ignored objections from Catholics, Protestants and Jews that had seen the opening night crowd forced to huddle by a hundred religious protesters toting placards. He'd spent a fortune on lawyers on three continents to snuff out pirate versions being staged in the US, Canada, West Germany and Australia. He'd fired the show's first director eleven weeks out from the opening after he'd been involved in a potentially scandalous car crash.

Stigwood had put everything on the line for this night. And he'd brought his family across the seas to witness what would end up being either a triumph, or a calamitous failure. Once before, he'd overreached. Just six years earlier, his empire had crashed, grabbing the headlines with a spectacular fall into bankruptcy. At least his family hadn't been on the spot to see that. Had Robert Stigwood climbed back to the top of the mountain, only to come tumbling down once more? Could the Australian really pull this off, and go on to become the greatest musical impresario of his age?

2.

A Starmaker Is Born

‘I was kicked out for not showing enough aptitude.’

Robert Stigwood

ONCE UPON A time, South Australians would snobbily declare that their bloodlines were ‘pure’, because theirs was the only Australian state never to receive British convicts during the colonial era. Of course, this was no guarantee that ex-convicts never settled in South Australia and raised families there. Robert Stigwood’s great-great-grandfather Henry was nonetheless a free settler, a native of Cambridgeshire who sailed from Liverpool to Port Adelaide in 1854 aboard the *Joseph Rowan*, the thirteenth immigrant ship to sail to South Australia from England. Henry’s last name was actually Stickwood. In Australia, it would morph into Stigwood.

A farm labourer, Henry settled in the Adelaide Hills, where his son, and Robert’s great-grandfather, Ralph Stigwood, was born. Ralph was a colourful character, known to brawl and mix with men with criminal records. His only son, William Bertie Stigwood, known as Bertie, was born in the Adelaide Hills town of Hahndorf, just to the southeast of Adelaide, in 1878. Bertie married Elizabeth Lees, and the couple’s only son William Gordon Stigwood, Robert Stigwood’s father Gordon, was born in March 1912 at Glen Osmond, a southeastern suburb of Adelaide on the way to Hahndorf. Gordon would have two younger sisters, Jean and Joan, the future Mrs Harvey and Mrs Peacock.

Bertie, Elizabeth and their children ultimately settled at Wellington Street, Maylands, an eastern Adelaide suburb close to Glen Osmond. In 1927, at the age of fifteen, Gordon Stigwood left school and started an apprenticeship as an electrical fitter. Four years later, Gordon was seeing a pert eighteen-year-old blonde nurse, Gwendoline Alice Asbury. The Port Adelaide-born daughter of Emma Asbury and railway worker and World

War One veteran Oliver Gordon Asbury, Gwen was a middle child among eight children, all girls but for Gwen's younger brother Colin.

According to Robert Stigwood years later, the Asburys were among the first to take shares in the South Australian Pastoral Company. That may well have been true, but, like the Stigwoods, the Asburys were a working-class family and never members of the 'squattocracy', the rural elite of South Australia. An uncle of Gwen's did inherit property in England. As Robert himself would later confess, his great-uncle proceeded to gamble away his inheritance, before falling, drunk, beneath the wheels of a train, in Victoria, and meeting his maker. Gwen, it would eventuate, inherited her uncle's taste for gambling, particularly on the horses. As history was to show, she would pass the gambling gene onto at least one of her children.

Gordon Stigwood and Gwen Asbury were married at Holy Trinity, Adelaide's oldest Anglican church, on 11 February 1932. It was a somewhat hurried wedding. For, five months later, Gwen gave birth to a son, Gordon William Stigwood, who would be forever known as Bill. Just seven weeks later, Gwen's forty-eight-year-old father died. For years to come, Oliver Asbury's premature death put pressure on young Gordon, and Gwen's married sisters, to support Oliver's widow Emma and the clutch of Asbury children still living at home.

Two weeks after Oliver Asbury's death, Gordon Stigwood was arrested by South Australia Police. Apparently mistaken for distant relative Michael Stigwood, an habitual criminal, Gordon was released without further action. Prior to this, Gordon's only brush with the law had been in the form of a traffic fine when he was sixteen. The year had been an eventful one, during which Gordon had become a husband, father, prisoner of the Crown and bereaved son-in-law, all before the age of twenty-one.

Gordon's job now took him, his wife and son to Port Pirie, 223 kilometres northwest of Adelaide. On the Spencer Gulf, the town housed a massive lead smelting works which, by 1934, would be the largest in the world. A tough, grimy, no-frills town, its population of a little under 10,000 was dominated by smelter workers housed primarily in Port Pirie's sixty boarding houses. This was a man's town, where males significantly outnumbered females. There, on 16 April 1934, Gwen gave birth to the couple's second son, Robert Colin Stigwood, who took his uncle Colin's name as his middle name.

And so began the eventful life of Robert Stigwood, international entertainment industry mogul, in very inauspicious surroundings.

Although two years separated them, Robert and elder brother Bill grew up best mates. To his dying day, Robert would retain two favourite childhood photographs of Bill and himself. One, taken when Robert was ten, showed Bill dressed as a pirate and Robert as a Scottish soldier, complete with kilt. The other photo had them wedged, koala-like, in a tree together.

In November 1941, with the Second World War two years old, Gordon Stigwood and his little family left Port Pirie and moved to Adelaide. Gordon had secured a job as a senior electrical fitter with J. A. Lawton and Sons, a coach and motor body building firm. The family took up residence at 21 College Street, Kent Town, three blocks from Rundle Street, Adelaide's high street, and just around the corner from Lawton's workshop on North Terrace, which gave Gordon an easy walk to and from work. The boys, the then nine-year-old Bill and seven-year-old Robert, were enrolled at a local primary school.

Occasionally through these years, Robert went to stay with his aunt, Connie Bansemer, one of Gwen's six sisters. Connie would recall helping her young nephew set up puppet theatres, with which he would entertain the neighbourhood. As a consequence, Connie reckoned, with a twinkle in her eye, she should be credited with launching Robert Stigwood's theatrical career.

Gordon Stigwood had been on the Australian Government's manpower rolls for some time when in October 1943 he was summoned to a medical examination by an army doctor. Five feet six and a half inches tall and weighing just 140 pounds, Gordon, a keen Australian Rules footballer, was lean and healthy. The doctor who examined him rated Gordon A1, fully fit for overseas military service. By this time, the demands on Australian manpower by the North African campaign, the Japanese capture of Malaya and Singapore, plus the ongoing New Guinea campaign, must have caused Gordon to begin to doubt that military call-up could be avoided for much longer.

The following January, preempting call-up and overseas service, Gordon voluntarily joined the Civil Construction Corps. Run like the army, this was a civilian body whose members served within Australia in war

support roles. In fact, Robert's mother told the boys that their father had to serve in the army, and that was how they would remember Gordon's wartime absence.

On 4 February 1944, Gordon reported to Adelaide railway station and set off for his first CCC posting, as an electrical fitter for the Allied Works Council at Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. Because much of the Territory, aka the Top End, was a war zone under martial law, civilians had been evacuated from the area, so Stigwood's wife and sons couldn't accompany him. Gwen, Bill and Robert remained at the family home in Kent Town.

Before long, Gordon was transferred to the Territory's tropical capital, Darwin. By then only occupied by CCC personnel and the military, it was virtually a ghost town, with those shops and commercial enterprises not left in ruins by Japanese air raids closed down and boarded up. Joining the staff at Darwin's Number 2 Power Station in Armidale Street, then the city's only working generating plant, Gordon was quartered at the Power House Mess, a military-style camp of fibro huts. Thirty-year-old Gordon soon became a valued subordinate to Darwin's Senior Electrical Engineer.

That November, Gordon, planning to obtain leave to go home for Christmas, received disturbing news from Adelaide that dramatically changed his plans. He learned that his wife Gwen had a man living in the family home with the boys and herself. According to Gordon's informant, this fellow wasn't just a boarder. By one account, Gordon's mother had caught Gwen and the unnamed man together. Convinced of Gwen's infidelity, Gordon determined to go down to Adelaide at once and take Robert, now ten, and twelve-year-old Bill, from her. Applying for compassionate leave, he gave quite explicit grounds: his wife's unfaithfulness and his desire to secure the custody of his children.

As Gordon soon discovered, obtaining leave in wartime wasn't easy. Bureaucratic wheels turned slowly across the nation as Stigwood's leave application found its way to G. A. Lavater, AWC acting Deputy Director of Personnel for the Northern Territory, at Alice Springs. Lavater wrote to William Dance, officer in charge of personnel, in Adelaide: 'I shall be pleased if you will have discreet investigations made and forward your recommendation to Mr Bagot as soon as possible.' Victor Bagot was the Allied Works Council's Assistant Secretary in Melbourne. In Adelaide,

Dance passed the request to William Lawrie, who delegated an investigation officer to conduct inquiries.

There was a grocery shop right next door to the Stigwood home in College Street, and this was the investigator's first port of call. From the loquacious shopkeeper the investigator learned that a man had indeed been living under Gwen's roof for some time, only to quickly move out three weeks earlier, about the same time Gordon had been alerted to his presence. The government investigator subsequently went to the local police station and inquired whether the police had anything on Mrs Stigwood. They advised she was not known to them.

William Lawrie wrote to Victor Bagot in Melbourne on 5 December, reporting the outcome of inquiries and commenting, 'The information to hand seems rather sparse.' Lawrie told Bagot that Stigwood would now be asked to name others who might corroborate his claim of family trouble. Lawrie undertook to submit a further report once more was known, but, as this would take time, suggested that normal service leave be granted Stigwood to allow him to go to Adelaide at once.

Meanwhile, although the investigator had been instructed to keep his inquiries discreet, the fact he had been sniffing around became known to Gwen. In all probability, the talkative shopkeeper next door alerted her. As a result, Gwen went storming into the AWC's King William Street offices in Adelaide. Proclaiming her innocence, she indignantly demanded to know what was going on.

'My husband sent me £50 to spend on Christmas goods and celebrations!' Gwen declared. 'And I expect him to be home for Christmas.'

Dance passed this information onto Bagot, remarking, 'She did not mention any domestic trouble or illness of the children. Owing to the wife's attitude and the lack of substantial evidence that there has been any domestic trouble, it is suggested that there may be collusion on this case in an attempt to obtain either compassionate leave or advanced annual leave.' Dance recommended Gordon be made to produce substantial evidence of family trouble before his leave application was taken any further.

When this was communicated to Gordon, feeling his honesty being questioned, he went to his boss, Darwin's Chief Engineer J. T. Cameron. Siding with Gordon, Cameron personally authorised one month's compassionate leave. When Victor Bagot in Melbourne learned of this, he

signed off on it, but stipulated that Stigwood must clearly establish that his return home was necessary.

On 20 December, Gordon flew to Adelaide. A confrontation with Gwen followed, during which she refused to let him have the boys. He was apparently proposing that his mother look after them. Staying with his parents Bertie and Elizabeth at Maylands, Gordon spent the next month making his own inquiries. It was a miserable Christmas for Stigwoods young and old.

When Gordon's leave expired in the last week of January 1945, he stayed on in Adelaide, determined not to return to Darwin until he'd found concrete evidence of his wife's infidelity. His Darwin boss granted him a week of his annual leave, but made it clear he must be back on the job in Darwin by 5 February, for the installation of the city's second power station, at Bishop Street. With just days to spare, Gordon finally learned the identity of Gwen's gentleman friend: William Sharman, from Darwin.

On Saturday 3 February, Gordon walked into Adelaide's Brookman Buildings in Grenfell Street and kept an appointment with lawyer John K. Alderman, before later that day boarding a train to return to Darwin. The following day, lawyer Alderman wrote to the AWC advising that his new client had instructed him to launch divorce proceedings against Gwen, with Sharman as co-defendant. Alderman expected writs to be issued the following week. With this action vindicating his course, Gordon would receive restitution from the AWC for his airfare, plus a day's travelling expenses.

As it turned out, Gwen didn't contest the divorce. Clearing the decks for a new life, she immediately enrolled her sons in one of Adelaide's most prestigious private schools, the all-boys Sacred Heart College in the affluent Adelaide suburb of Glenelg, as boarders. The fact that this was a Catholic school didn't bother Anglican Gwen. Robert, apparently considered bright, went into Grade VI, while Bill, even though two years his senior, went into Grade VII, just a year ahead of him.

Following in his father's footsteps, Bill took up Australian Rules football, playing in the school's under-13 team that winter. Their mother being a music lover, Robert followed in her footsteps, taking up the piano at Sacred Heart. To his few schoolfriends and brother Bill, Robert would be known as Bob throughout his school years, while always continuing to be called Robert by his parents.

Young Bob struggled during that first year at Sacred Heart. For one thing, his piano lessons were a failure. With turmoil on the home front, lonely and missing his parents, his mind was everywhere but piano class. 'After a year's lessons,' he would later recall, 'I was kicked out for not showing enough aptitude.' Little did he or anyone else know that the failed piano student would one day be a major influence on popular music worldwide.

With Gwen's two sons away at boarding school across town, her lover William Sharman apparently moved in with her at College Street. As a consequence, in October, Gordon ceased paying Gwen maintenance. As usual, Gwen was proactive, on 16 October storming into the AWC offices in Adelaide to complain of financial hardship and demanding that her husband resume payments to the children and herself. Urgent telegrams flowed back and forth between AWC offices in Adelaide and Darwin, and Gordon's boss demanded an explanation from him. The personnel office in Alice Springs was notified on 19 October: 'He assures the Senior Electrical Engineer that funds are now en route to his wife and will continue to go to her regularly.'

For a divorce to go ahead, both principal parties were required to be resident in the state. So, Gordon applied for a transfer to Adelaide. His superiors released him on condition he transfer back to Darwin once the divorce was finalised, and down to Adelaide went Gordon in December 1945. He would live with his parents until the divorce became official the following August, then return to Darwin to join the new Commonwealth Department of Works and Housing, successor to the AWC.

Meanwhile, Gordon refused to continue paying for Robert and Bill to board at Sacred Heart College, so for the 1946 school year Gwen allowed them to once more live at home, although she insisted they remain at the college as day students. To help pay for their tuition, she would go back to work as a nurse. During the Stigwood boys' second year at SHC, William Sharman was no longer in the picture. Moving away, he took a job at Mount Gambier, southeast of Adelaide. On 7 June 1946, Sharman was killed there, in an accident. He was just twenty-two years of age, eleven years younger than Gwen Stigwood.

Robert, once more secure in his mother's home and affections, and taking the Glenelg tram to school each day, began to settle down at Sacred Heart and embrace student life. 'SHC provided strict discipline and a kind

and caring atmosphere,' he would say. There was much about boarding he hadn't enjoyed. Apart from separation from his mother, the food had been appalling. 'The boarders' food prepared me for anything!' he later declared, only half jokingly.

Himself taking up Australian Rules football, Robert played in Sacred Heart's under-14s B team in 1946. His father would have approved. Neither of the Stigwood boys was involved in extra-curricular activities during 1947, Robert's first year of high school, but 1948 proved a watershed year for him. His mother once more enrolled him as a boarder at Sacred Heart, perhaps because a new love interest had come into her life. But Robert's earlier experience of dormitory life had toughened him up.

This year, he thrived. Not so much in the classroom. School principal Brother Sylvester complained that there seemed to be a general lack of concentration in the college through 1948. It was outside the classroom that Robert made his mark. Not only was he back on the football field, in the school's under-14 A team, Robert had found a subject that enthralled him: theatre. That December, the fourteen-year-old appeared on stage for the first time, one of six students performing a short, comedic piece as part of the college's annual prize-giving program.

The Obstructive Hat by Thomas Anstey Guthrie had first appeared in London *Punch* in the 1890s. In the Sacred Heart production, Robert played the second lead, Maria the mother. Two of the other boys also played female roles. Another boy appearing on the prize-giving program that night was Paul Linkson, who played a piano duet and acted in a one-act play. Although the tall, slim, bespectacled Linkson was two years older than Robert, the pair would become firm friends, and, within a few years, fellow performers on Adelaide stages.

In 1949, as Robert's interest in the theatre grew, he also took an active interest in religion, converting to Catholicism. 'The Marist Brothers had a lot of influence on my life back then,' he would remark in the 1990s. In 1948, five former Sacred Heart boys had entered seminaries and three had become priests. 'I thought about the priesthood at one stage,' Stigwood later confessed. 'Converts are much more devout.'

Robert's embrace of the Catholic family may have had a lot to do with the fact that there was a cleft in his own family that year. On Saturday 16 April, Robert's fifteenth birthday, his father remarried. At the Methodist church in the northern Adelaide suburb of Enfield, Gordon wed Alma

Stratford, eldest daughter of Mr and Mrs G. T. Stratford of Nailsworth, after a short engagement. Like Gwen, Alma was a nurse. The couple set up home in Darwin, where Gordon was kept busy in 1950 helping install new generating equipment at the Armidale Street Power Station. Gordon, disapproving of his youngest son's artistic inclinations, and probably irked by the boy's loyalty to Gwen, cut Robert from his life. Not only did Robert not attend his father's wedding, Gordon banned him from setting foot inside his house. Robert would never have a relationship with stepmother Alma.

The Marist Brothers may have marked Robert Stigwood down as a potential future ecclesiastical recruit, but in 1949 he became a recruit of a different kind, joining Sacred Heart College's military cadet corps. Although it has been suggested Robert was primarily attracted by the military uniform, he proved a good soldier. When twenty-six of the school's 146 cadets attended an eight-day advanced training course in January 1950, Robert was among five senior NCOs appointed. Staff Sergeant Stigwood was put in charge of the quartermaster's store, and, at year's end, received formal commendation for a job well done.

Brother Bill had left SHC at the end of 1949. Following in their father's footsteps, in 1950 Bill began an apprenticeship as an electrical fitter, before, in June, volunteering for the Royal Australian Air Force. Bill would have a long career as an electrical fitter in the RAAF.

As for Robert, he increased his extra-curricular activities by taking up athletics. For Robert had discovered he could run. Not fast. But he had endurance. Encouraged by friend Paul Linkson, who was now not only school captain and head prefect but also athletics captain, Robert proved a good long-distance runner, and to his enormous pride was selected to represent Sacred Heart running the mile at 1950's Adelaide Colleges Combined Sports carnival. At the last minute, the event was cancelled because of a polio epidemic. It was, Robert would later say, the greatest disappointment of his school years.

That year, too, his newfound Catholic faith saw him recruited by Paul Linkson into the Sodality of Our Lady, or Children of Mary, and also the Young Catholic Students' movement, an international church youth group with 1500 members in Australia. YCS conducted prayer vigils, and a consistent YCS prayer through 1950 was for the fall of communism. Almost four decades later, as the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 and

communist rule across eastern Europe crumbled, Robert would receive a phone call from old friend and former YCS president Linkson.

‘Well,’ said Linkson, ‘we’ve finally done it. So, what’s next?’

In Darwin, Robert’s father and stepmother celebrated their first wedding anniversary with a dinner at the Hotel Darwin. Alma was by this time pregnant, and the following month Gordon secured three months’ leave to take his sickly wife south to stay with her parents until the couple’s first child, daughter Claire, Robert’s half-sister, was born in August. It would be some years before Robert even clapped eyes on Claire.

At the end of 1950, having passed his year XI examinations, Robert informed his father that he wanted to go to university, becoming the first member of their family to do so. Gordon was impressed, until Robert told him he wanted to study arts.

‘No!’ was Gordon’s terse response from Darwin.

‘He didn’t like me,’ Robert would later declare. ‘I was too artistic.’

‘You either do electrical engineering, or nothing,’ Gordon pronounced. As far as he was concerned, if a career in electricity was good enough for him and Robert’s elder brother, it should be good enough for Robert.

No deal, said Stigwood junior. Unable to afford university fees, Robert gave up on his arts degree ambitions, and, equipped with his Leaving Certificate, went looking for a paying job.

3.

King of the Arts

‘The production, by Robert Stigwood, and the acting, show some life.’
Adelaide Advertiser

LIVING WITH HIS mother at 47 Lindsay Street in the Adelaide suburb of Plympton Park in 1951, sixteen-year-old Robert Stigwood secured his first job, as an office boy at Adelaide Art Engravers, a subsidiary of the Adelaide *News*, the daily newspaper that would soon form the foundation of the Murdoch family’s News Limited empire. Despite the ‘Art’ in the title, this business was far from arty. It was a metal foundry, converting photographs into the half-tone plates that were used in the printing of the newspaper.

If Robert thought that working for a newspaper would give him the opportunity to develop his interest in writing, he was soon disappointed. Looking around for something more creative, he landed a position with an Adelaide advertising agency. In later years, Stigwood would claim he’d worked for the agency as a copywriter, a creative pursuit. In reality, he was a costing clerk, working with figures.

At the same time, his social life blossomed as he joined the Therry Dramatic Society. Founded in 1943 and named after Father John Therry, Australia’s first Catholic priest, the society was dedicated to presenting spiritually uplifting plays. At Therry Society weekly meetings, Robert made a number of new friends, among them Anne MacMahon, a former St Dominic’s Priory College student. An accomplished pianist, and three years older than Robert, Anne looked a little like his mother.

Throwing himself into the theatrical deep end, Robert this year also joined Paul Linkson and a dozen others under the age of twenty-one in founding Adelaide’s Younger Theatre Group. YTG members would produce and act in short plays, and Robert put his hand up to be both an

actor and producer/director. In July, revelling in his new theatrical credentials, Robert attended the Three Arts Costume Ball held in the John Martin's department store's massive dining hall.

'Robert Stigwood was, appropriately, the King of the Arts,' Adelaide's *Mail* reported, 'with palette and jewel-studded crown.' This was the first public manifestation of a lifelong Stigwood fascination with all things royal. Anne MacMahon also attended the ball that night, dressed as a Persian dancing girl. The following month, the *Mail* photographed young Stigwood at the St Dominic's Priory College old scholars ball at Australia Hall, accompanying Patricia Pitman and Norla Grant.

The highlight of the Therry Society's year was an annual theatrical production tourney staged over two nights in October at St Francis Xavier's Cathedral Hall. The tourney, of five one-act plays, was presented in front of both a paying audience and an adjudicator who awarded prizes for best production and best actors. Putting his hand up to produce and direct one of the plays, Robert's first-ever stage production was *Even Exchange*, a one-act comedy by Paul S. Maccoy taken from a collection of royalty-free plays.

Despite months of rehearsals, the Stigwood effort was not a huge success, with other productions taking all the prizes. Still, it was a start. Incidental music for all the productions was provided by Robert's new friend Anne MacMahon, while Allen Munn was one of the tourney's actors. In future years, Munn would be South Australian manager for EMI Records, among other things managing the Adelaide legs of tours by EMI artists including the Beatles and Rolling Stones. In 1984, Munn would co-found Adelaide's Independent Theatre.

In 1951, after the Korean War broke out, the Menzies Government introduced the National Service Act, which required young men of eighteen years of age to serve in the Australian military for a year. Between 1951 and 1959, when it was abolished, the National Service program saw 227,000 Australians serving. In the Aussie vernacular, they were 'Nashos', as opposed to the Regulars, the long-term volunteers.

To shorten their period of service to six months, National Servicemen could opt to join either the air force or the navy, on the proviso they served overseas. In addition, like retiring Roman legionaries, all Nashos were

required to serve in the part-time Reserve following their discharge, for five years. Robert had a life-long dread of flying, but didn't mind boating, so he put his name down for the Royal Australian Navy. He was called up as part of the National Service intake of 4 July 1952. Later that same month, in Darwin, Robert's second half-sister, Heather, was born to Gordon and Alma.

Robert's call-up put an end to his YTG plans and Therry Society productions that year. One of his last social flings was to escort Rosemary Jenner to the Catholic Ball for debutantes at Adelaide's Palais Royal on 21 May. Robert's friend Paul Linkson escorted another deb, Margaret MacMahon, to the ball that night.

On 4 August, Stigwood reported for duty at the RAN shore base HMAS *Torrens* in Port Adelaide, listing his mother as his next of kin and his religion as Roman Catholic. Apparently ashamed of having been born in Port Pirie, he gave his birthplace as Adelaide. He was dispatched to HMAS *Cerberus*, the RAN's principal training base, on the Mornington Peninsula south of Melbourne.

After his initial medical examination, he was rated category D, 'unfit for overseas service'. This is surprising, considering the stamina that Stigwood exhibited as a distance runner at school, and the daunting constitution he would display as an adult. Eighteen-year-old Stigwood, five feet ten inches tall, with blue eyes and fair hair, was then a slight figure, although the only physical abnormality noted by his RAN medical examiner was a scar on the left forearm. The D classification meant he would have to serve a full twelve months with the navy.

At *Cerberus*, he underwent four weeks basic training, including eleven days at sea, during which he discovered that not only did he have good sea legs, he actually revelled in heavy seas. 'I never get seasick,' he would later say. 'In fact, I like it when it's rough.' Another medical examination followed his training, and this time he was reclassified category C, subject to further medical examination in six months' time, meaning he could now serve overseas. On 12 September, with the rank of ordinary seaman, he joined the 1500-ton frigate HMAS *Culgoa*, which, the following March, would commence active service in the Korean War.

Less than two months after Stigwood joined *Culgoa*, on 3 November, he was pulled off the ship and returned to *Cerberus*. We don't know why. Four weeks later, he was sent back to *Torrens* at Port Adelaide, and clerical

duties. The following February, he underwent the required six-month medical exam. Again rated category D, he was discharged from full-time RAN service, with an entitlement to wear two decorations, the Australian Defence Medal (ADM), and the Australian National Service Medal (ANSM).

Returning to the advertising agency game, Stigwood was made a junior account executive, one of the 'suits', the people who wore suit and tie and dealt directly with the clients and decided strategies, budgets and media plans. This experience would equip him for a unique opportunity on the other side of the world a decade later.

Now, too, Stigwood launched back into Adelaide's social whirl, and the theatre world, throwing himself into 1953's Therry production tourney, staged over three nights at Cathedral Hall in May. Producing Wilfred Grantham's *The Sixth Hour*, a drama about Judas Iscariot, he was also one of the young actors taking part. Again, he failed to win a prize. Allen Munn took the producer's award, and Munn's brother Harry the acting gong. The judge found Robert's Grantham play unconvincing, while in 8 May's *Advertiser*, theatre critic C. B. de Boehme remarked, more generously: 'The production, by Robert Stigwood, and the acting, show some life.'

Not that Robert seemed to mind. He was having too good a time. His newfound Catholic faith had evaporated. Years later, he recalled that, by the time he was nineteen, his nightlife was way too much fun for there to be any room for religion. Therry Society meetings were now ending with a party. Therry did rhyme with merry, after all.

As required by his National Service obligations, Robert was now a member of the Navy Reserve, and in June, no doubt to his annoyance, the navy ordered him back to sea. Joining the old training corvette HMAS *Junee*, he sailed up and down Australia's east coast for twelve days before returning to Adelaide and his civilian job.

In July, he was again dressing up, this time for the annual Sacred Heart Collegians masked ball at Centennial Hall, and throwing a pre-ball party at Glen Osmond for fifty guests, including pal Paul Linkson. Now secretary of the Collegians, Linkson came dressed as a Mexican. Robert's partner for the night was Anne MacMahon, and again he went down the royal road: with Queen Elizabeth II crowned that year, Robert and Anne dressed as a Coronation peer and peeress.

Come October, Robert was back on stage, this time at Burnside Town Hall acting in the Younger Theatre Group's production of Kenneth Horne's light comedy *Fools Rush In*, produced by YTG member Nancy Basheer. *The Advertiser* reported, 'Jan Colquhoun, Robert Stigwood, Wendy Hastwell and Roger Holditch led a cast which had a few weak moments.'

This year, too, Robert lost his grandmother, Elizabeth Stigwood, who passed away at her Maylands home at the age of seventy-one. Robert's grandfather, seventy-three-year-old Bertie, had died the previous November while Robert was in the navy. By one account, Stigwood's mother was not sorry to see Elizabeth go, blaming her mother-in-law for the break-up of her marriage to Gordon.

Young Stigwood now took a leading role in the Younger Theatre Group, in 1954 being elected vice president and accepting the post of public relations officer. Dropping out of the Therry Dramatic Society, the nineteen-year-old drove a planned YTG program of three major three-act plays to be staged in March, July and November, ambitiously producing two of them himself and taking the lead role in the third. The YTG's industrious new vice-president rented rehearsal rooms in Currie Street, had a logo designed, and, for those members who would serve as ushers, had uniforms made, complete with the YTG logo emblazoned on the breast.

The first play of the YTG's 1954 season was Stigwood's production of Clemence Dane's *A Bill of Divorcement*, with Stigwood personally rewriting the thirty-year-old work to bring it up to date. Just as Adelaide was beginning to recover from an earthquake earlier in the month which caused half a billion dollars' damage in today's money, including to the tower of the unfinished St Francis Xavier Cathedral and to Adelaide's Post Office clocktower, the play ran over four nights in late March at Stow Hall, with Stigwood's now good friend Paul Linkson one of his lead actors.

To attract publicity, Stigwood announced that proceeds from the first night would go to the South Australian Oral School, an institution for deaf children. The previous year, the YTG had succeeded in attracting 250 people to its performances. Stigwood's *Bill of Divorcement* dragged in 800 punters. But it didn't exactly bowl over the critics. 'Clemence Dane's talkative drama about English divorce laws and insanity seemed very dated, despite the group's attempt at modernisation,' said *The Advertiser*. C. B. de

Boehme, now writing for Adelaide's *News*, was more generous: 'Robert Stigwood has tried to be very thorough in his production, and is rewarded by the show holding together.'

The July production was A. A. Milne's evergreen *Toad of Toad Hall*, with Stigwood playing Toad and Leo Heffernan producing. Stigwood went to the press in June to promote ticket sales by talking up the rising popularity of amateur theatre. Enthusiastically, he told the *News*, 'The tremendous increase in ticket sales at amateur theatre productions can only be described as amazing!'

'To what do you attribute this increase, Mr Stigwood?' asked the *News* reporter.

'It's been suggested that contributing factors include a lowering standard of films compared with a rising standard of theatre productions,' Stigwood replied. He went on to say that YTG's sale of 800 tickets for its March production paled into insignificance when compared to bookings for *Toad of Toad Hall*, which were tracking towards 2500.

Over three nights in mid-July, Stigwood trod the boards as Toad at the Unley Town Hall. Producer Heffernan received praise from the critics, as did Stigwood's co-stars Harry Munn, Jan Colquhoun and Bill Menz. 'Robert Stigwood has the right approach,' wrote C. B. de Boehme in the *News*, 'and makes a very good try at it.' The *Advertiser* felt his Toad was 'well-drawn – the amusing show-off'.

Stigwood never forgot those reviews. Almost half a century later, he would declare, tongue-in-cheek, 'I got wonderful notices, but I knew it was typecasting.' Following the final performance on Thursday 14 July, Stigwood and fellow YTG members returned to their Currie Street rehearsal rooms for an after party that lasted into the early hours.

Due to produce and act in one of YTG's November productions, Stigwood now suffered a crisis of confidence. To his mind, despite the moderately positive reviews his Toad had been sufficiently poor to prescribe 'the elimination of myself as an actor', while he concentrated on his next production, Karel Capek's satirical tragi-comedy *The Insect Play*. This bold choice was challenging even for professional directors. Then he had a brainwave. Professional director Colin Ballantyne, who, with actress wife Gwenneth, was an Adelaide institution, was 'between engagements'. What if Stigwood could coax him into directing and co-producing YTG's last play of the year?

A founder of the Arts Council of South Australia, Ballantyne had directed large-scale seasons of Shakespeare at the Tivoli Theatre from 1948 to 1952. Among his protégés were two young local actors, future arts-loving Premier of South Australia Don Dunstan, and Keith Michell, who would make his name in Britain as a fine Shakespearean actor and a defining King Henry VIII on 1970s television. Charmed by young Stigwood, Ballantyne agreed to take on his play.

Forty-six-year-old Ballantyne was like a caricature of a Shakespearean theatre director, pretentious and pontificating, with large gestures and florid phrasing. He could be disarmingly rude, only to soothe newly opened wounds with sudden warmth. Ballantyne was an adherent to the method-acting dictates of Konstantin Stanislavsky, who required actors to immerse themselves in their characters. This was to prove an interesting challenge for the young actors in the YTG's production of *The Insect Play*, in which most cast members play insects. In addition to serving as assistant producer, and despite holding doubts about his acting skills, Stigwood, encouraged by Ballantyne, took two supporting roles, Ichneumon Fly and First Engineer of the Ants.

'I hear that members of the cast have improved out of all recognition under Colin Ballantyne's direction,' wrote Kevin Crease in the *News* that October. Ballantyne also brought in two young designers, Graeme Smith for the fantastical costumes, and, for the scenery, Toni Grahame. While female YTG members sewed the costumes and Grahame painted the backdrops, Michael Lawton completed a lighting design to Ballantyne's direction. Stigwood soaked all this in. A week before opening night, he coaxed *Advertiser* columnist Marian March and a photographer along to shoot Wendy Hastwell in one of the production's astonishing butterfly costumes. The resultant picture and news story were worth their weight in promotional gold.

Before packed houses at North Adelaide's Studio Theatre, Stigwood and his colleagues performed their insect antics over four nights in late November. Audiences were dazzled by ingenious costumes, brilliant scenery, light, colour, music and movement. While the professional critics didn't think the YTG's young actors quite did the play full justice, Stigwood was one of several singled out for praise for their efforts.

Apart from appearing as an extra in three of his screen productions many years later, this would be Robert Stigwood's last acting performance.

Ballantyne and *The Insect Play* taught him valuable lessons. He'd seen audiences emerge from this production with smiles of delight and wonder. Daring presentation could wow audiences. Theatre could be an unforgettable experience.

4.

Chasing a Dream

‘Now you can stand on your own two feet.’

Gwen Stigwood

ACCORDING TO ONE published story which Stigwood never denied, by 1954 he had set his mind on marrying an Adelaide girl. It has been suggested this was his Therry Society friend Anne MacMahon. Unfortunately, Anne is no longer around to confirm or deny this; she passed away in 2009. So the story goes, in the second half of 1954, when this girl set off for a working holiday in Europe, she and Stigwood agreed to meet up in Paris the following June. The only problem was that Stigwood had no savings to pay for a European trip.

In October 1954, much excitement gripped Adelaide theatrical circles when the Rupert Maynard Theatre Company began a three-month season in the city, opening at the Comedy Theatre before transferring to the Theatre Royal. Sent around Australia by producers J. C. Williamson’s, the company was led by visiting English theatre duo Hector Ross and his wife, June Sylvaine, a couple who would one day play a pivotal role in Stigwood’s life.

Lancashire-born Ross had appeared in nine Alexander Korda movies and fifty-six TV dramas, and both he and his wife and co-star, daughter of English playwright Vernon Sylvaine, had notched up numerous West End supporting roles. Meeting on a London TV set, they had a two-year-old daughter, Susan, who accompanied them to Adelaide on the penultimate stop of their Australian tour.

In Adelaide, Ross and Sylvaine, treated as a glamorous theatrical couple, a B-grade Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, were flooded with social invitations and offers to babysit daughter Susan. Stigwood met the Rosses that November when they were staging *Beauty and the Beast*

matinees with Sylvaine as the Beauty and Ross as the Beast, followed by leading roles in *White Cargo* at night. His mentor Colin Ballantyne took the twenty-year-old backstage to meet the couple. Ross, now in his forties, was past the blush of youth, and, to cover hair loss, painted exposed parts of his scalp with black theatrical make-up. Meanwhile, his tall, shapely wife June had the girl-next-door appeal of a Hollywood star.

Stigwood subsequently socialised with the couple at the Ballantynes' monthly open houses, telling them of his own theatrical aspirations. When Ross informed the young man that he and his wife were returning to England the following year, after a January season in Perth, Stigwood responded that he was planning to travel to Europe himself before long. To which Ross offhandedly suggested Stigwood look them up if he ever made it to their part of the English woods.

Three days before Christmas, when the Younger Theatre Group splurged some of the year's profits on a Christmas dance at the Waterfall Gully Kiosk, Stigwood was one of four YTG members who threw pre-dance dinner parties. He subsequently celebrated Christmas with his mother, his brother and Bill's relatively new wife – pretty, round-faced brunette Judith Anne Prothero, who was six months pregnant with their first child, son Ronald.

Shortly after Christmas, while the Rosses were still completing their Adelaide engagement, Stigwood began his journey to England, having jumped into a means of getting halfway there. An old tanker was sailing to India to be broken up, and its owners were seeking a cut-rate crew for the final one-way journey. Based on his RAN service, Stigwood was hired.

There were several drawbacks to the plan. National Service obligations required Stigwood to serve in the Naval Reserve until 1958. In departing Australia now, he was breaking the law. The RAN would actually search for him, unsuccessfully, in 1956. Then there was his lack of money. His mother helped out here, with a loan. So, away he sailed. To some, this was brave, bold Bob at his adventurous best. Others thought his plan harebrained.

Early in the new year, when the tanker docked at Madras, today's Chennai, on the Bay of Bengal, a crew member fell into an empty hold and seriously injured himself. According to Stigwood, to administer morphine before the injured man was lifted from the depths of the hold, Stigwood himself volunteered to climb down a swaying seventeen-metre rope ladder.

From Madras, Stigwood hitched rides overland as far as Turkey, where, in a small, rural village, he lived for three months with the family of a new young friend, working with them in the fields. By June 1955, Stigwood had arrived in Paris, and, the story goes, on the appointed day, at the appointed place, he turned up for the long-anticipated rendezvous. But the girl of his dreams didn't. Another version of the story has it that by the time he arrived in Paris, Stigwood had made a discovery about his sexuality, and he in fact stood up the girl.

If Anne MacMahon was indeed the girl he was to meet in Paris – she arrived in London in 1955 – neither Stigwood nor she would hold a grudge about the failed rendezvous, remaining lifelong friends. Anne, who always called Stigwood 'Bob', worked in London until 1960 before returning to Adelaide. There, in the 1970s, she would serve as Premier Don Dunstan's personal assistant.

In the summer of 1955, Stigwood travelled on to London, arriving many kilograms lighter than when he'd set off from South Australia, having suffered dysentery en route. Whilst travelling, he'd written home to his mother asking for more money, sent care of Australia House in London, which acted as a mail holding centre for visiting Australians. A letter from his mother was indeed waiting for him on arrival, but there was no money. Gwen wrote: 'I've put up with your nonsense. Now you can stand on your own two feet.'

Stories Stigwood told over subsequent years put the amount of money then in his pocket at between £1 and £5. 'Little intending to stay,' he would later say, he found 'digs' in the down-at-heel inner-west London suburb of Notting Hill. Then crowded with Caribbean immigrants, it offered dirt-cheap rents. Some reports have stated that Stigwood first lived in Earl's Court – in 2015, he himself spoke about his first London flat in Notting Hill. Within fifty years, the area became a highly desirable and extremely expensive address, but in 1955 its once-grand houses were subdivided into small flats. Stigwood was told he could buy a one-room Notting Hill 'bedsit' for £50. But he was broke.

Stigwood now exercised the entrepreneurial flair that would ultimately guide him to huge success. Using the last of his money, he bought booze and nibbles. He then invited neighbours to a party in his flat, charging admission. Being a good spruiker, and having had plenty of practice staging fun parties back in Adelaide, he attracted a large crowd, and it was a great

party. As a result, Stigwood was able to pay his rent for several more weeks, as he went in search of a job.

His plan was to gain experience in English theatre and save enough to get back home to Adelaide, where he would put that experience to use. The London he'd landed in had yet to entirely shake off World War Two. Rationing had only ended the previous year. Some bombsites still sat undeveloped. The top earning movie of the year would be World War Two epic *The Dam Busters*, based on the book by Australian Paul Brickhill, who, as it happened, had spent part of his youth in Port Pirie and Adelaide. Brickhill had also authored the bestselling *Great Escape*, while the top movie of 1956, *Reach for the Sky*, story of legless fighter pilot and POW Douglas Bader, would be based on another Brickhill bestseller.

Despite a national hankering for past glories, Britain in 1955 was transitioning to an era of British leadership in unlikely areas, popular music and fashion, an era that would make, break and remake Stigwood. With television, which had yet to reach Australia, already established in the UK via the BBC, Britain's first commercial TV network, ITV, which would one day provide Stigwood with a profitable foundation to his first empire, launched the year of his arrival. The top TV shows for 1955 were Benny Hill's first comedy series and police show *Dixon of Dock Green* on long-established commercial-free BBC-TV, with *Robin Hood* and *Sunday Night at London Palladium* leading the ITV roster.

Meanwhile, popular music sales in Britain in 1955 were dominated by American solo artists, principally crooners Rosemary Clooney, Tony Bennett and Tennessee Ernie Ford. An American band also hit number one in Britain that year, Bill Haley and His Comets, with 'Rock around the Clock' spearheading a new teenage craze, rock 'n' roll. Stigwood would have heard this new sound on BBC Radio. Unlike Australia and the US, there was no commercial radio in Britain at the time.

The introduction of 33¹/₃ rpm albums, with twenty minutes of listening time either side, would eventually give Stigwood one of the three components of what American academics would later dub his 'Synergyism', the synchronised marketing of music, theatrical productions and movies.

He soon found work, on commission, as a door-to-door vacuum-cleaner salesman. With Britain's improving postwar standard of living, more homes were being carpeted and Hoovers and Electroluxes came within the

financial reach of the middle classes. Door-to-door salesmen hawked everything from insurance to pharmaceuticals, with vacuum cleaners at the high end of the sales spectrum. The key to sales success was to charm your way in the door to demonstrate your cleaner on the homeowner's carpet. Stigwood would prove one of the greatest charmers in modern business, but as a door-to-door charmer he struggled.

In this job, Stigwood set his own hours, and, having never forgotten Hector Ross's off-hand invitation, he went around London's theatrical agents in his spare time trying to locate Ross and Sylvaine. An agent who had previously handled the couple ruined his plans when he revealed they'd fallen in love with Perth, Western Australia when playing the city following their Adelaide season, and had settled there, with no plans to return to England.

Nonetheless, in knocking on agents' doors, Stigwood landed a job as an office junior at the staid Joan Underwood Agency. The most exciting thing the Underwood Agency did in 1955–56 was tour the 1920s German operetta *Lilac Time* around provincial Britain. Stigwood was still working at Underwoods when, in October 1956, he opened the *Daily Mail* to see June Sylvaine and her equally glamorous theatrical mother Marie Bell, photographed outside London's Old Bailey.

It transpired that, in 1952, British author Antonia White had published a novel, *The Sugar House*, which featured an unsavoury actress by the name of June Sylvaine. Encouraged by her parents, June had sued the author for libel, and she and Hector had sailed back to England to pursue the case. Even though White swore that her character wasn't based on June, the judge found that the actress had been libelled, and awarded her damages of £200. This was a little less than the average UK annual salary for women at the time, so it didn't exactly make Sylvaine rich. In fact, she and her husband had up until then been close to broke. While waiting for the case to be heard, Sylvaine had won a small part in the 1956 BBC-TV drama *Double Identity*, but Ross could find no acting work at all.

Sylvaine told the press that spending so long in Australia had been 'theatrical death' for the couple. 'London managers and agents soon forget one,' she grandly lamented.

So, using the £200 as seed money, the couple set up a repertory theatre company, the Hector Ross Players, at Norwich, in Norfolk, under the business name Norwich Theatre Clubs. Learning of this, Stigwood threw in

his job at the Underwood Agency and hightailed it to Norwich, hoping the Rosses would employ him. Hector Ross fobbed him off, suggesting that, if a vacancy did arise, it would be Stigwood's. So, to be on hand in East Anglia when that day came, he found a job nearby. A very different job.

Much later, Stigwood would describe his new employer as 'a home for backward teenage boys'. More precisely, it was a borstal, a British prison for young offenders aged fourteen to twenty-one. This was the Hollesley Bay Borstal, east of Ipswich on the Suffolk coast, made famous by Irish writer Brendan Behan who wrote about his experiences as an inmate there in his 1958 book *Borstal Boy*. Joining Hollesley Bay as an assistant housemaster, Stigwood worked the night shift. Being a night owl, this suited him. His job, he would say, mostly entailed keeping inmates from moving between dormitories after lights-out, and he found his time supervising young offenders both 'unsympathetic and frustrating'.

On his weekends off, he went north to Norwich to patronise Hector Ross's shows. These were tough times for Ross and his wife. As television spread throughout the land, English repertory theatre was dying a slow death, and 'rep' in rural Norwich was never going to be a money-maker. Producing the same old theatrical staples he'd staged in Australia, Ross, hoping to pull in the crowds, brought in 'name' actors for short seasons, among them a young Edward Woodward, an old Dame Peggy Ashcroft, and comedian Frankie Howerd. Ross also resorted to extreme money-saving measures. For lending their goods as props, local shopkeepers received a credit in the theatre program and two free matinee tickets. With matinees not well attended, there were often more people on stage than in the stalls.

Finally, in June 1957, Stigwood's persistence paid off. Ross and Sylvaine employed him to manage Hector Ross Players shows at Norwich's Theatre Royal. They themselves slid out of town, in debt, heading south to expand their operations to Portsmouth's New Theatre Royal. Here, the couple would stage a different play each week and run a theatre and drama school, simultaneously selecting plays for Stigwood to put on in Norwich with actors Ross hired from London theatrical agencies.

Although Stigwood saw little of them, Ross and Sylvaine were not the most personable of bosses. Employees found Ross remote. As for Sylvaine, she could be both moody and vain. Stigwood's time working for the couple would provide him with a salutary lesson in how *not* to be a theatrical producer, but the job opened another door. At the beginning of the summer

of 1958, Stigwood spied a handsome young man up a ladder at Norwich's Theatre Royal with a paintbrush in his hand, seventeen-year-old Stephen Anton Komlosy.

'I met Robert when I was on a holiday job painting scenery at the Theatre Royal,' says Komlosy today. A boarder at Highgate Public School in London, Komlosy hadn't seen his parents in five years. They were in Singapore, where his father was chief city planner and his mother handled PR for the local affiliate of UK film company the Rank Organisation. Komlosy had come up to Norwich to stay with friends of his parents over the holidays. At that point, his career path was all mapped out: after completing one more term at Highgate he would join London's Slade School of Art to gain a degree in commercial art. His mother would then secure him a job with Rank as an art director. Stigwood would before long change that plan.

On his first day working at the Theatre Royal, Komlosy had been invited for a drink by Hugh Futchter, one of the Hector Ross Players then appearing at the theatre. Komlosy couldn't understand why Futchter seemed so fixated on him as they sat talking in a pub. 'I was naive and unaware of the gay world,' he says now. Komlosy had a steady girlfriend back in London, and his heart was set on marrying her. Shortly after the puzzling outing with Futchter, Komlosy was approached by the young Australian managing the Hector Ross Players, who introduced himself as Bob Stigwood.

Blond, pasty Stigwood was a little shorter than Komlosy. He was physically slight, and, to Komlosy, looked fragile. Komlosy would be surprised when Stigwood later told him he'd hitchhiked across the globe from Australia. Stigwood had a ready smile, which revealed white buck teeth – ill-fitting dentures, the result of a childhood accident in which Stigwood had lost his own teeth. 'I liked him immediately, and we got on well,' says Komlosy. Stigwood, for his part, was deeply impressed by this five-foot-eleven teenager with thick blond hair and photogenic bone structure. Komlosy, who was of Hungarian descent, was 'an exceptionally good-looking young man' according to later Stigwood friend Simon Napier-Bell.

At their first meeting, Stigwood cautioned Komlosy, 'Don't be seen with Hugh Futchter.'

‘This was ironic,’ says Komlosy now, ‘as I soon discovered that Robert was gay himself! He was very disappointed that I wasn’t.’

According to one Stigwood friend, Stigwood had left Adelaide a confused virgin and arrived in England a confirmed homosexual. By the time he was working for Hector Ross, Stigwood was clearly only attracted to males. He didn’t allow Komlosy’s lack of interest in him sexually to spoil their new friendship, although he did show his displeasure when Komlosy flirted with HRP actress Zoe Higgs, daughter of noted artist Augustus John.

Before the summer was out, Stigwood was out of a job. Ross and Sylvaine’s Portsmouth acting school had attracted only four students, and their repertory company was haemorrhaging money. Closing down their Norwich operation, they would struggle on in Portsmouth until October 1959, with, on 8 September of that year, Sylvaine filing for bankruptcy. Sympathetic theatre owner Commander Reggie Cooper would subsequently set up Sylvaine and Ross at Portsmouth’s Kings Theatre.

In Norwich, the unemployed Stigwood was confident he could make a better fist of the theatrical business than Hector Ross, and, finding his new young friend Stephen extremely bright – Komlosy was a future member of Mensa – urged him to forget art college and join him in business. Stigwood proceeded to convince the Norwich City Council, owners of the Theatre Royal, to give Komlosy and himself a six-month licence to stage their own repertory productions. Even then, Stigwood possessed a rare power of persuasion. ‘He is a Svengali,’ Komlosy would say. ‘He dominates your mind. He imposes his will.’

Komlosy quit school, and the pair planned and staged their own productions, with actors sourced from the same London agencies that supplied Ross. Over the next six months, Stigwood and Komlosy discovered how hard it was to attract audiences to repertory theatre. ‘We just survived,’ says Komlosy. To save money, he himself appeared in some productions. In the Samuel and Bella Spewack comedy *My Three Angels*, he played the handsome young man who saves the day. One night, he forgot to come on, ruining the ending.

Despite the lack of money, Stigwood and Komlosy were enjoying themselves. But it wasn’t to last. When their six-month lease expired, Norwich Council announced it was demolishing the Theatre Royal to make way for a car park. Stigwood and Komlosy were given two weeks’ notice to quit. Now, Stigwood dared to think that, like Dick Whittington, he could

return to London and achieve fame and fortune there. For he and Komlosy had daydreamed about Komlosy singing and acting his way to stardom, with Stigwood his manager. 'I suppose I looked like a rock star,' says Komlosy now. He did.

'I want to manage a pop star,' Stigwood had confessed to him early in their relationship. 'I tried with one singer, but it came to nothing.' Stigwood hadn't named the singer in question, nor did he reveal whether this was back in Adelaide or in England. Stigwood convinced his friend they could turn the dream into reality.

'We went down to London determined and full of hope,' says Komlosy. It helped that he was able to convince his parents to loan them £5000 to set up in business. This was not peanuts; the average house price in Britain was then £2500. Despite the fact the money wouldn't arrive until the middle of the following year, at the end of 1958, quite penniless, the pair took a room together in a once-grand house at 42 Hornton Street, just off Kensington High Street. In the house's heyday, their flat had been the elegant drawing room.

Landlord Tom Mullis was a tall, gregarious former British Army colonel with white hair and moustache, who ran an illegal bar in the basement. Taking a liking to Stigwood and Komlosy, Mullis and his wife didn't push for their rent. Within a relatively short time, Stigwood and Komlosy would return the financial favour to Mullis, handsomely. Meanwhile, as the two young men struggled to make ends meet, Stigwood displayed skills as a cook, apparently picked up aboard ship. 'We lived on tins of beans, button mushrooms and toast,' says Komlosy, 'which Robert was adept at making into a seeming gourmet meal.'

In the new year, the pair registered a company, Robert Stigwood Associates Limited. 'I had fifty per cent,' says Komlosy. Next, they rented a single office in the heart of the city, in a soot-blackened building at 41 Charing Cross Road, on the Bear Street corner. Always image conscious, Stigwood commissioned a logo for the company, an intertwined R, S and A, and had corporate stationery printed. Stigwood then set out to make his seventeen-year-old partner famous. The twenty-six-year-old Australian was sublimely, naively confident he could pull it off. 'It was a lunatic thing to do,' Stigwood said years later, marvelling at his lack of business smarts at the time. 'Because I didn't know anybody.'

Knocking on the doors of theatrical agents and producers, Stigwood pushed his protégé. There was one small problem: Komlosy couldn't sing. Looking back, Komlosy confesses, 'I had taken some singing lessons, but failed miserably.' Facing reality, after several months the pair decided to give up on Komlosy's singing ambitions and 'see if we could create some pop stars', says Komlosy. To survive, RSA would have to become a genuine talent agency.

5.

Becoming the Starmaker

‘He loved its trickery and tease.’

Simon Napier-Bell

ONCE THE LOAN came in from Komlosy’s parents, RSA Ltd moved to a two-roomed office on the top floor of a far from salubrious building in Earlam Street, a few doors from the Cambridge Theatre, which, years later, Komlosy would own. Stigwood and Komlosy didn’t live together long. ‘By 1959,’ says Komlosy, ‘we had our own places.’ He himself had moved into a house his parents owned in Shenfield, Essex, and commuted to work each day by train. Stigwood, meanwhile, took a shabby flat in Hampstead of which Komlosy did not approve.

Komlosy was busy dating the best looking female models on their growing books, and in 1960 would marry one of them. With his first wife, Joan, Komlosy would have three children over the following five years. Komlosy says that Stigwood also used their business like a dating agency: ‘Robert had boyfriends amongst the many handsome young men in our agency.’

Come 1960, Robert Stigwood Associates Limited was booming, via an unexpected income stream. The company was based around a model agency core, ‘which I ran, with Bob concentrating on the serious stuff’, says Komlosy. Stigwood was unimpressed with the quality of acting and presentation in television commercials then going to air. Having been involved in advertising and acting back in Adelaide, Stigwood became convinced that RSA could funnel a better class of talent onto commercial TV.

Few of London’s existing talent agencies had embraced this new commercial television thing. The educated classes considered commercial TV common and tacky; their TV dials were permanently stuck on the BBC.

While most established talent agencies saw commercial television as an annoyance, Stigwood saw it as a potential gold mine. Running press advertisements seeking television actors, Stigwood and Komlosy cornered the market. Very quickly, RSA became the single largest commercial television casting agency in London, representing forty per cent of the actors used on commercial TV in Britain. The agency especially dominated the casting of long-form commercials, like infomercials today, with a stable of eight regular presenters who included none other than Tom Mullis, the pair's former landlord.

RSA's large roster of TV talent included both established working actors and wannabees, and, with Komlosy handling casting for commercials, Stigwood set out to secure them roles in TV drama; the 'serious stuff', as Komlosy puts it. One of these actors was Essex boy John Leyton, who'd gone to the same private school, Highgate, as Komlosy. Leyton had put himself through London's Actors Workshop by taking bit parts in TV dramas, then moved to York to work with the York Repertory Theatre company. Back in London, he did the rounds of the talent agencies for months, without success. Unaware of RSA's existence, he was introduced to a bloke named Bob by a mutual friend.

'I was introduced to Robert Stigwood at an opportune time,' says Leyton today. 'He was looking for clients and I was looking for representation. He didn't waste much time, as within days he put me up for a national TV series.' With Leyton looking a lot younger than his twenty-four years, Stigwood was able to convince Granada to consider the handsome blond for the part of Ginger Hebblethwaite, teenage offsider to hero James 'Biggles' Bigglesworth in Granada TV's adaptation of Captain W. E. Johns' *Biggles* adventure novels. Stigwood set up a meeting between Leyton and *Biggles*'s producer in London, after which Leyton was invited to Manchester to audition. And then one day Stigwood rang to tell Leyton he had the job.

Biggles' forty-two thirty-minute TV episodes ran between April and September 1960, in the process garnering Leyton thousands of teenage girl fans. In Stigwood's future career, he would look for artists with more than one string to their bow: actors who could sing, and singers who could either act or write their own material. It was a formula for success that he had discussed with Komlosy in Norwich before they'd launched into the talent agency business.

‘It was obvious from the outset that Bob had huge entrepreneurial flair,’ says Leyton. Stigwood had never given up on his ambition of creating a rock star, and having discovered that Leyton could sing, by late 1960 he set out to exploit the young man’s fan base by turning him into a recording artist. Leyton had actually auditioned for EMI several years before, with Russ Conway on piano. That audition’s failure was put down by Leyton to poor song choice. Stigwood took him along to audition for Pye, but when they too passed, the young manager refused to throw in the towel. Over the coming years he would build the careers of young men he took under his wing with stubborn, unbending loyalty. It was as if he’d assumed a father figure role, and was nurturing his ‘boys’ the way he would have liked his own father to have nurtured him. Driven by a determination not to fail Leyton the way Gordon had failed him, Stigwood tried a new tack.

Not long before, he had met Robert George ‘Joe’ Meek in a London pub. Variousy described as ‘eccentric’, ‘mad’ and ‘a bit of a boffin’, Joe Meek was a young former BBC sound engineer who dressed like a ‘Teddy Boy’, with slicked-back hair, narrow tie, drainpipe trousers and ‘winkle-picker’ shoes. Meek was obsessed with producing his own recordings, and had told Stigwood he was recording singers in his bathroom, which he claimed had fabulous acoustics.

When Stigwood and Komlosy visited Meek’s grubby flat, above a leather goods shop at 304 Holloway Road in Islington, they agreed that his bathroom ‘studio’ produced a staggeringly good sound. Although Komlosy found Meek more than a bit strange, even intimidating, he could see the potential of what he was doing. So, too, could Stigwood.

Meek told the pair that he had formed a company, RGM Sound Limited, and recorded several artists in his bathroom, releasing their recordings on the Top Rank label, to limited success. To get the best recording equipment, said Meek, he needed another £100. Stigwood agreed to provide the money if Meek recorded John Leyton. A partnership was born, with Stigwood and Komlosy launching RSA into the music business via a boffin in a bathroom.

Not long before Christmas 1960, Stigwood and Komlosy took Leyton to Meek’s flat, and there in the bathroom they recorded a cover version of Ray Peterson’s American hit ‘Tell Laura I Love Her’, which Meek released on the Top Rank label in early 1961. At that point, music giant EMI bought out Top Rank. EMI already had a UK version of ‘Tell Laura I Love Her’, sung by Ricky Valance. So they pulled Leyton’s version from the shops and

pushed Valance's, which, gallingly for Leyton, Stigwood and Komlosy, sold more than a million copies.

Stigwood, determined to make Leyton the next Tommy Steele, who had rocketed to stardom in 1957 with 'Singing the Blues' before moving into theatre and film, changed tactics, taking Leyton to auditions for the West End stage musical *Johnny the Priest*. Leyton failed to win a part, but EMI's lone talent scout, or A&R (artists and repertoire) man, happened to be in the theatre for his audition. Ironically, the A&R man told Stigwood that EMI would be interested in releasing a record by his client, if he could come up with the right number.

Taking Leyton back to Joe Meek, Stigwood had him record a new track by fledgling local songwriter Geoff Goddard, 'The Girl on the Floor Above'. EMI accepted it, and released it, but the single failed to sell. Meanwhile, Stigwood and Komlosy set up RSA Publishing, to handle songwriter's royalties from record and sheet music sales, with Goddard their first songwriting client.

Despite the flop, Stigwood took the singer straight back to Joe Meek's 'studio' to record 'Johnny Remember Me', another Goddard composition, hiring violinists and female backing vocalists for the session. Headphones on his ears, Meek sat at his new two-track Grundig tape recorder in the kitchen, with wires trailing to microphones throughout the flat. 'There was me in the living room recording the main vocal,' Leyton would recall. 'The string section was in the corridor. The girls singing that famous echoing chorus of "Johnny, remember me" were in the bathroom.'

Stigwood had meanwhile learned from casting calls that the script for the first episode of a new sixty-minute ITV soap opera, *Harpers West One*, set in fictional West End department store Harper's, called for rock star character Johnny St Cyr (pronounced 'sincere') to sing a number to open the store's record department. Stigwood took the TV show's director to lunch, then played him the tape of 'Johnny Remember Me'. 'He loved it,' Stigwood would recall.

Not only did Stigwood succeed in securing Leyton the role of Johnny St Cyr, he convinced the producers to create a more lavish set for his rendition of 'Johnny Remember Me' in the opening episode, backed by a band called the Outlaws, the later Chas and Dave.

On the strength of the *Harpers West One* tie-in, EMI agreed to give Leyton another chance, and pressed hundreds of thousands of copies.

'Johnny Remember Me' was released on their HMV label the same day the first episode of *Harpers West One* went to air, Monday 26 June. To Stigwood's great frustration, BBC Radio refused to play the song. Even though Stigwood had changed a Goddard line from 'the girl who died' to 'the girl I lost', the haunting number was clearly a lament for a dead lover, with the female chorus representing the girl calling to Johnny from the grave. The Beeb declared it would have nothing to do with a song about death, although cynics suggested the BBC was simply determined not to promote a record connected with a program on ITV, their competition.

As it turned out, Leyton and Stigwood didn't need the BBC. *Harpers West One* secured a phenomenal viewership, topping the ratings in 1961, and reaction to the Leyton song from young females was immediate. Record sales went through the roof, with the cunning Stigwood capitalising on its popularity by convincing *Harpers West One* producers to use the song several more times on the show. Despite the lack of radio airplay, 'Johnny Remember Me' sold 600,000 copies in its first week, going to number one in the UK and staying there for weeks.

The song was soon being heard in the most unlikely places. Never imagining that a decade later he would be working with the producer of the track, future Stigwood client sixteen-year-old Tim Rice heard 'Johnny Remember Me' for the first time over the public address system aboard a cross-Channel ferry in 1961. By the end of the year, the single would sell two million copies in Britain. In Australia, Stigwood's six-year-old nephew Ron received a gift in the mail from his Uncle Bob in England. The first 45 rpm record that Ron ever owned, it was 'Johnny Remember Me'.

'It wasn't long before we started making waves in the music business,' says Leyton. On the 'get 'em while they're hot' principle, Stigwood quickly had Leyton record a follow-up single with Meek. 'Wild Wind', released by EMI in September, went to number 2. Stigwood had achieved his aim of making John Leyton a recording star, and, with his name on the records as their producer, was also making a name for himself.

Tommy Steele had filmed his life story within months of his first hit, so Stigwood and Komlosy set up a film and TV production arm, Robert Stigwood Productions Limited, and put up the money for Viscount Films to make a fifteen-minute short film around Leyton. Directed by television director Norman Harrison, and shot mostly at Pinewood Studios, *The Johnny Leyton Touch* featured Leyton singing his latest number, 'Son, This

Is She'. Again à la Tommy Steele, the film was released to cinemas, to precede the main feature. Despite this exposure, and expenditure, 'Son, This Is She' only reached number 14.

To this point, RSA had only been making money from Leyton by taking their manager's commission off the top of the artist's record royalties. Stigwood and Komlosy decided they could do better. Boldly, the pair went to see Sir Joseph 'Joe' Lockwood, chairman of EMI. Fifty-six-year-old Lockwood was a former flour miller who had taken EMI from loss to handsome profit since assuming the chairmanship six years earlier. His success came largely from focusing on the production of records rather than record-players, and broadening the way EMI distributed its products. By the 1970s, Lockwood would turn EMI into one of the world's largest music industry conglomerates.

Komlosy remembers Stigwood telling Lockwood, 'Having one A&R man is a crazy way to do business, Sir Joseph. EMI should open its doors, and ears, to anyone, the hundreds of hopefuls, who think they can make a record. This will give EMI an endless choice of new material.'

Stigwood and Komlosy went on to propose to license Leyton and other RSA artists to EMI's labels in return for an agreed percentage of sales. Lockwood, a courtly, impeccably dressed, discreetly gay man, sucked on his pipe, and nodded slowly. EMI's catalogue was then laden with music appealing to older generations: the classics, dance orchestras and crooners. Lockwood was astute enough to recognise that Stigwood and Komlosy had their fingers on the teenage pulse. And their novel concept could make them all rich; this 'leasing' of recordings to a record company was a first. No one had thought of it before.

Still needing to be convinced Stigwood and Komlosy could deliver, Lockwood asked what other singers RSA could bring to EMI. Stigwood responded by naming Iain Gregory, a handsome young actor for whom he'd secured the continuing role of Blondel in ITV series *Richard the Lionheart*, which commenced filming in 1961 for broadcast over 1962–63. Lockwood was a fan of Gregory, and this sealed the deal. Stigwood had no idea whether Gregory could actually sing, and despite his and Komlosy's subsequent efforts with several demo tracks, Gregory would prove a poor vocalist; his recording career never took off. But he was the key to securing RSA the agreement with EMI.

When Lockwood and Stigwood shook hands on the deal for a publicity photograph, Lockwood looked the distinguished company chairman, and slender young Stigwood looked like his office boy. Other producers, including Joe Meek, would copy RSA by doing similar deals, with the concept becoming the first step in ending the dominance of the UK recording industry by the major players, Britain's EMI and Pye, and America's Decca.

Stigwood then signed Leyton to play a rock singer in the 1962 Dick Lester feature film *It's Trad, Dad*. Leyton had no lines, he merely mimed his new single 'Lonely City' opposite teenage vocalist Helen Shapiro, who had a big hit with 'Walking Back to Happiness'. Armed with production money from EMI, Stigwood and Komlosy transferred their recording sessions from Meek's bathroom to the professional IBC Studios in Portland Place. Meek, as co-producer, was present for the taping of 'Lonely City', but Stigwood was now running the show.

Another RSA discovery Stigwood recorded with Meek that October was Mike Berry, a handsome youngster whose 'Tribute to Buddy Holly' was released by EMI but failed to emulate Leyton's chart-topping success, only making it to number 24. Stigwood would persevere with Berry over the next few years, in the recording studio and on the touring circuit. With his focus on solo artists, Stigwood had little interest in groups, but he did sign a novice London band to back Berry. When its four members came to his office, the group still didn't have a name. 'We can worry about that later,' Stigwood told them.

With the contract signed, the band members excitedly piled into their battered van and drove off. A little way down Earlham Street, they were pulled over by four policemen.

'Where did you get all that equipment?' a suspicious copper demanded as he surveyed the guitars, amps, PA system and mikes filling the van's rear.

The band's protests of innocence fell on deaf ears, until their new manager came hurrying to their rescue. Stigwood charmed the coppers and reassured them the youths owned all that gear and were in his employ. After the police departed, Stigwood grinned at the boys. 'You looked like a lot of innocents when I came along.' They became the Innocents. After they hounded Stigwood to record a single of their own, in 1963 he would produce a song for them, 'Stepping Stones', but it would fail to chart.

Having acquired a taste for screen production with *The Johnny Leyton Touch*, Stigwood and Komlosy ventured into television drama, with an unexpected subject for their debut as TV producers. *Return to Answer* was to be an innovative ITV series whose 30-minute episodes would feature a different figure from history returning to answer for their past deeds as they were grilled by a modern-day prosecutor. Late in the year, Stigwood produced a pilot episode. Entitled *Traitor's Gate* and driven by Stigwood's passion for all things royal, it was an interrogation of King Richard III focusing on the murder of the young princes in the Tower of London.

This pilot was directed by Edward 'Eddie' Joffe, a good friend of Stigwood's who'd previously only made a documentary for Granada. The drama featured just two players, both from RSA's large list of acting clients. Noted Shakespearean actor Paul Daneman played King Richard, with Christmas Humphries his interrogator. *Traitor's Gate*, Stigwood's first-ever production for the screen, would slip into the ether in 1962 and be swiftly forgotten. The projected series failed to go ahead.

During this period, too, Robert Stigwood Productions made maps for *A Land of Heroes*, a ninety-minute BBC TV documentary about modern Greek history that would air in July 1962. It is probably not coincidental that the documentary's producer and director, thirty-eight-year-old Therese Denny, hailed from Adelaide. With his initial forays into the screen arena proving unprofitable, Stigwood would shy away from further film and TV production for another seven years.

As Christmas approached, John Leyton was sleeping late and driving a red Austin-Healey convertible purchased from the spoils of his two hits, as Stigwood, having found quick success with hit records, refocused on the music business, which was soon like a drug to him. Said friend Simon Napier-Bell, 'He became fascinated by it. He loved its trickery and tease, and the apparent ease with which money could be made.'

As far as Stephen Komlosy could tell, in all the time since Stigwood had left Australia he had maintained regular contact with just one person back home, his mother Gwen. Now, being feted in the British press as a successful impresario, it was time, Stigwood decided, to make a brief but triumphant return to Australia.

On 21 December 1961, Stigwood landed back in Adelaide, almost seven years to the day since he'd left South Australia as a seaman. Despite a dread of flying, he'd flown from London to spend Christmas with his family and conduct a little business.

Before leaving the UK, he'd employed a London public relations firm to trumpet his trip *Down Under* to the Australian press. According to the PR blurb, twenty-seven-year-old Stigwood headed a group of companies worth £250,000, with business interests said to include chairmanship of the only videotape production company in the UK. He was personal manager to 'a group of rising young stars' including John Leyton, and, said the PR blurb, 'He will negotiate for British stars to visit Australia and discuss the release of British recordings, songs, films and TV programs.' Komlosy received not a mention. The release was clearly designed to impress Stigwood's Australian friends and relatives.

As he passed through Sydney and Melbourne on his way to Adelaide, Stigwood established contact with local music publishers Alberts and met with EMI Australia. He'd brought along John Leyton's 'Wild Wind', which EMI agreed to release the following February. Stigwood announced that, if Leyton sold as well in Australia as he did in Britain, he would bring him out for a national tour, as Tommy Steele had done in 1960. (It didn't, so he wouldn't.) Stigwood also attempted to sell *The Leyton Touch* to Australian distributors, and *Traitor's Gate* to Australia's fledgling TV broadcasters. Without success.

In Adelaide, he spent Christmas with his mother and her new husband, David Burrows, at their home in Evandale, a suburb fringing eastern downtown Adelaide. David and Gwen worked together, jointly managing an Evandale nursing home and living on the premises. Robert's stepfather, a divorcee like Gwen, was a stout, balding man who disliked the limelight and liked a drink. David would enjoy his stepson's generosity, but behind his back would comment disapprovingly on 'Robert's lifestyle'.

After Christmas, Stigwood boarded a flight back to England that took him via Darwin, where brother Bill was now based with the RAAF and living with his young family at Fanny Bay. During the flight's refuelling stop, Bill took Judith and his children to the airport to catch up with Robert, and allowed him to meet his nephew Ron and eighteen-month-old niece Joanne for the first time. Ron Stigwood would always remember how well spoken and English his Uncle Bob sounded. At this get-together, the still

slim and gangling Robert Stigwood, business mogul, did something that astonished his brother. Feeling guilty for not having brought the children gifts, Robert slipped the expensive watch from his wrist and gave it to young Ron. To his lasting regret, Ron would lose that watch sometime during the next few decades.

From now on, Bill Stigwood and his mother received green envelopes from England every month. With Robert subscribing to a British press-cuttings service, Bill and Gwen received copies of every UK newspaper and magazine article mentioning him. Nephew Ron would always look forward to those green envelopes, and their connection with his uncle's glamorous faraway world.

6.

On the Up

‘Stigwood is brilliant; there’s no getting around it.’

Mike Sarne

TWENTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD Mike Sarne was a part-time model on the RSA books when, in the spring of 1962, Stephen Komlosy booked him to do a TV commercial for Kodak. The fair-haired, handsome Sarne had been born in England to Czech parents; his real name was Michael Scheuer. Coming into the RSA offices to collect his pay cheque after doing a weekend shoot for the Kodak commercial, Sarne bumped into Robert Stigwood.

‘That went very well,’ said Sarne merrily, waving his cheque, ‘and I actually got paid.’

Ever since returning from Australia early in the new year, Stigwood had been looking for another Johnny Leyton to expand his pop-star stable. ‘Can you sing?’ he asked Sarne.

‘Yes, I’m trying to do a bit of singing,’ Sarne replied. With the ambition of getting into musical theatre, he’d been auditioning for West End musical comedies, singing Howard Keel and Frank Sinatra numbers.

When Stigwood organised a meeting between Sarne, Komlosy, Joe Meek and himself, Meek turned up with young musical director Charles Blackwell and a song called ‘Fountain of Love’, which Sarne recorded even though he thought it a stupid choice.

‘Well,’ said Meek once that was decided, ‘what are we going to do for a B side?’

‘I’ve got a number of mine called “Little Doll”,’ volunteered Blackwell. At the piano, he sang it for the others.

Sarne didn’t mind the song, but wasn’t happy with the title. ‘It should be the main line in the chorus, “Come Outside”.’

Stigwood agreed, but felt the song needed a second voice. ‘I can hear a girl talking back to you, saying, “Why do you want to take me out? What do you want to do?”’

Sarne loved the idea. ‘Stigwood is brilliant,’ he would later say. ‘There’s no getting around it.’

So, Komlosy booked eighteen-year-old model and actress Wendy Richard for the recording session. RSA found the tall, pretty blonde a lot of small parts in television that year, including appearances in four episodes of *Harpers West One* as a receptionist. Wendy had a strong Cockney accent, which was why Komlosy sent for her. For Komlosy ran the recording session. ‘Although Bob’s name is on the record as producer,’ says Komlosy today, “‘Come Outside’ was actually produced by me. Robert was not even in the studio, as can be attested by Charles Blackwell.’ To Wendy Richard’s great amusement, Komlosy had her record a series of naive-sounding responses to Sarne’s ‘Come Outside’ lines.

‘The thing just clicked,’ Mike Sarne would say.

When EMI released the single early in the summer of 1962, it was ‘Come Outside’ that received all the airplay. Going to number 1 in late June, it stayed there for two weeks. Stigwood’s name was on the record, and on his company. With the younger Komlosy kept out of the limelight by the Australian, as far as the music industry was concerned Stigwood had the makings of a Midas touch.

Although this would be Sarne’s only solo hit, RSA would tour him with its other acts for the next few years. As for Wendy Richard, she would become a familiar face on TV, firstly in another series set in a department store, the iconic 1970s sitcom *Are You Being Served?*, playing salesgirl Miss Brahms, followed by a twenty-two-year stint in the role of Pauline Fowler in the soap *Eastenders*.

Stigwood and Komlosy’s collaboration with Joe Meek ended that year, 1962. Komlosy felt Meek was jealous of their success. In 1964, Meek would have a worldwide hit with his production of the Tornados’ instrumental ‘Telstar’. Three years later, the increasingly erratic Meek would murder his landlady then take his own life.

Stigwood continued to guide John Leyton’s career, releasing several more singles and an LP for him over 1962–64, although none of these later releases matched the success of his earlier hits. Knowing that the singer aspired to be a serious film actor – Leyton’s greatest ambition at the time

was to star in a movie directed by famed Hollywood director Elia Kazan – Stigwood secured him the role of tunnel king Willie Dickes in John Sturges' Hollywood adaptation of Paul Brickhill's *The Great Escape*, which was shot in Bavaria that summer of '62.

Australian actor/singer Don Spencer, later a familiar presenter on TV's *Play School* in both Britain and Australia, became an RSA client this year. In October, Stigwood took him into the studio to record a debut single, with the A-side, 'Fireball', arranged by Charles Blackwell. It was released on EMI's HMV label in October, with Stigwood convincing Gerry and Sylvia Anderson, producers of the *Fireball XL5* children's TV series, to use it as the show's closing theme. The Andersons, who pioneered marionettes on TV, would launch their most iconic series, *Thunderbirds*, two years later. Despite the TV tie-in, 'Fireball' would only reach number 34.

On the lookout now for potential female recording stars, Stigwood's first choice was sixteen-year-old Carol Hedges, a Joe Meek discovery. After Meek did nothing with her for six months, Stigwood poached her. Carol overheard Meek and Stigwood arguing about her at the studio, after which Stigwood offered her RSA management and recording contracts. The eccentric producer never signed a contract with anyone, so, of course, Carol signed with starmakers RSA.

After learning that Carol admired black American singers Billie Holliday and Sammy Davis Jnr, Stigwood gave her a showbusiness name, Billie Davis. Feeling she still needed polishing, he sent her to a drama teacher for elocution lessons and enrolled her in a Leicester Square fashion school. Late in 1962, while Billie was being polished, Stigwood travelled to the US for the first time in his life. Spending a month in New York City, he introduced himself to American record industry executives, lollled in music clubs listening to their artists, and bought copies of hit releases he thought had potential in the UK.

He returned to London with a suitcase filled with American singles. One of these was the Exciters' 'Tell Him'. By this time, knowing that competing producers had secured better royalty shares than RSA was getting from EMI, Stigwood and Komlosy did a leasing deal with Decca, for whom they recorded Billie singing 'Tell Him'. Released in the UK in January 1963, it became a top 10 hit, even though the Exciters' version went to number 1 at the same time.

By August 1963, RSA's recording acts Leyton, Sarne, Berry, Spencer and Davis had collectively racked up eighteen top 40 entries in two years. With Stigwood gaining a name as a music manager and producer, RSA moved to larger, plusher offices in Craven House, 234–238 Edgware Road, W2.

Stigwood, having befriended Brian Epstein, Liverpool-based manager of the Beatles, who were on the verge of conquering the world, secured a contract from him to produce Beatles' fan magazine *Beatles Monthly*, hiring two staff specifically to put it together.

RSA now also represented the US Motown label in the UK, arranging tours for their black artists and promoting new releases. Komlosy found himself chaperoning twelve-year-old Stevie Wonder, promoting his first album, and eighteen-year-old Diana Ross, to whom Komlosy took a shine until frightened off by her manager and future husband Berry Gordy.

By this time, emulating his bosom buddy Brian Epstein, Stigwood was living the millionaire lifestyle, although he was far from a millionaire. Stigwood and Epstein, sharing a common interest in music, gambling and pretty boys, socialised together whenever Epstein came down from Liverpool. The first time the Liverpoolian took him to his favourite London gambling club, Curzon House, Stigwood was amazed that after they ate a fabulous meal and downed the best champagne Epstein walked out without putting his hand in his pocket – he gambled so much at the club's baccarat tables, it covered his food and drinks bill, as it did for all its well-heeled clients. Stigwood was not yet rich or famous. But he was working on it, and cultivating an image that he was both.

He now had himself chauffeured around in a cream Bentley. It was partly out of necessity; he never learned to drive, and would never possess a driver's licence. He also began frequenting London's best restaurants, music clubs and gambling houses, often drinking all night. He took Komlosy to the horseraces, a new experience for Komlosy, who watched on as Stigwood bet big on the gee-gees. 'But I never got the bug like he did,' says Komlosy.

Life was good. 'Both Robert and I were using the company as a personal fiefdom,' Komlosy reflects today. And, while they continued to use their proven instincts to back winners, why shouldn't life only get better?

7.

Going Bust

‘He got the knee sixteen times, one for every grand he owed.’

Keith Richards

AS STIGWOOD LATER told Simon Napier-Bell, promoting concerts was ‘a quick way to make a buck’. Stigwood had a knack of making friends with other artists’ managers and promoters, and during 1961 and 1962 had succeeded in getting Leyton and Sarne on the bills of tours organised by established promoters Larry Parnes and Bernard Hinchcliffe. By April 1963, Stigwood and Komlosy were ready to send a tour of their own around the country.

The April/May ‘All Stars ’63’ tour, proudly presented by Robert Stigwood & Associates, featured the Four Seasons from the US, six other artists hired from other managers and RSA acts Don Spencer, John Leyton, Mike Sarne and Mike Berry, backed by the Innocents. The top admission price was eight shillings. In addition, RSA printed a souvenir program selling for two shillings. Covering twenty-one towns in twenty-one days, the tour involved two shows a night, one at 6.30, another at 8.40. Each act did a few numbers, then, while a well-known compere kept the audience’s attention, the next act moved into place. After each show, it was straight on to the next town and the next venue.

As an added incentive to his own artists, Stigwood recorded their performances live, primarily at Edmonton’s Gaumont on 17 May, for an LP. That rare live album was released as *One Night Stand* on EMI’s Columbia label. With the basic recording facilities available, the sound quality was poor, and the album didn’t do well. But the tour’s box-office receipts were strong, enabling Stigwood and Komlosy to set their minds to even bigger things for 1964.

Another new Stigwood friend, Eric Easton, was booking agent and co-manager with Andrew Oldham of a group called the Rolling Stones, whose

first two singles, covers of Chuck Berry's 'Come On' and Lennon-McCartney's 'I Wanna Be Your Man', had made the charts and generated a teenage following. In late 1963, Stigwood convinced Easton and other managers to lend him artists including the Stones as he packaged a 1964 UK tour.

The 'Stars of '64' tour kicked off at Edmonton's 3000-seat Regal Theatre on 8 February with John Leyton and Mike Sarne headlining. The Rolling Stones were midway down the bill. With their third single, their very different take on Buddy Holly's 'Not Fade Away', being released that month, they, and Stigwood, were hoping it would help drag in audiences. The tour's other acts included the Swinging Blue Jeans and RSA artists Don Spencer, Mike Berry and Billie Davis, on a gruelling schedule that wound up in Morecambe on 7 March, and involved seventy-two gigs. The 'Stars of '64' tour did so well that Komlosy independently set up three property companies that summer, investing in theatres in London and Glasgow.

John Leyton, Stigwood's biggest singing success, was now pursuing a film career, over the next few years appearing in *Von Ryan's Express*, *Guns at Batasi* and *Krakatoa, East of Java*. So, as the summer of 1964 waned, Stigwood sought to create a new recording star, in the person of handsome nineteen-year-old Anglo-Indian Simon Scott. Seeing Scott as the next Cliff Richard, Stigwood had him record 'Move It Baby' backed by RSA band the Le Roys, for release on Parlophone. Stigwood was so enamoured with Scott, and his potential, he told America's *Billboard* magazine he was planning a US tour for him.

Komlosy was in charge of promotion for RSA artists, and to publicise the Scott single Stigwood convinced him to have hundreds of plaster busts made of Scott. These made the young man look like a Regency dandy, with long, thick hair and ruffled shirt. Sent out to broadcasters and journalists, the busts were soon the talk of the British music industry, but not for the intended reason. They brought Scott not fame, but derision. Tossed around offices or dropped from great heights to shatter spectacularly on the pavement, the busts created great amusement, but not sales success. 'Move It Baby' only went to number 37.

Another month-long RSA tour started that September. The Stones' 'Not Fade Away' had gone to number 3, so this time they topped the bill, supported by Inez and Charlie Foxx, the Mojoes, Mike Berry backed by the Innocents, and the derided Simon Scott backed by the Le Roys. Stigwood

and Komlosy planned another tour for the autumn, with, as their headliner, twenty-five-year-old Texan P. J. Proby, who had top 10 hits in the UK in 1964 with 'Hold Me', 'Somewhere' and 'Maria'. Proby's twenty-four-day tour would be in ABC Cinemas in twenty-four towns, starting on 6 November, with support acts including the Pretty Things, Barron Knights, Simon Scott, Mike Sarne and the Le Roys.

The tour had almost sold out by the time Proby arrived in England a week ahead of the start date. On Saturday 30 October, Komlosy received an urgent call from Proby's American manager Gil Friesen, who would later establish A&M Records. Friesen told Komlosy that Proby was refusing to proceed with the tour. When Komlosy rushed to the singer's London hotel, he and Friesen found Proby's room empty. The bathroom door was locked. Smashing it down, the pair discovered Proby on the floor, unconscious after a drug overdose.

Komlosy called Stigwood, who promptly cancelled Proby's contract. Stigwood had planned to bring another American star, legendary singer/songwriter/guitarist Chuck Berry, to the UK for a January 1965 tour. Thinking fast, he called Berry's manager in the US, hoping to get the star to come to England early to replace Proby. Berry, famous in the 1950s for 'Maybellene', 'Roll Over Beethoven' and 'Johnny B. Goode', had been released from prison in 1963 after a three-year sentence for transporting a fourteen-year-old girl across state lines. He'd swiftly made a comeback in 1964 with 'Nadine' charting in the UK and 'No Particular Place To Go' reaching number 3.

To get Berry to tour in the first place, Stigwood had outbid promoter Don Arden, whose daughter Sharon would marry Black Sabbath front man Ozzy Osbourne. Tough guy Arden called himself 'Mr Big'. Unhappy about being outbid, he'd phoned Stigwood, whom he rated an Australian nobody and thought had only arrived in Britain in 1959. 'You want Chuck Berry?' he'd said menacingly. 'God bless you, Robert. Take him!'

Berry's manager agreed to the earlier tour dates and set about cancelling Berry's other commitments. Press advertisements announced the change of headliner. Four days later, the American star's manager called Stigwood, to say he'd been unable to free his singer from other contractual arrangements after all. Berry wasn't coming.

Shattered, Stigwood and Komlosy had to cancel the tour three days out from its advertised start. Tens of thousands of pounds would be paid out in

ticket refunds. ABC Cinemas were sympathetic and didn't levy their full venue cancellation fees. But RSA also had to carry the cost of two bouts of advertising, tens of thousands of useless tour programs, and numerous other logistical costs.

Music paper *NME* announced: 'Promoter Robert Stigwood's 24-day autumn tour headlining P. J. Proby, the Pretty Things and the Barron Knights has been abandoned.' A statement from RSA noted the failed attempt to secure Berry as a replacement, and, hiding the real reason for Proby's contract cancellation, said it had come 'after a disagreement over who should compere the show'. RSA had insurance cover for the tour, but the insurance company dismissed their claim once Proby's drug-taking became known. 'It crushed us,' says Komlosy.

Stigwood and Komlosy would throw the dice one more time. Chuck Berry was still booked to tour the following January; the contracts were signed, the tour locked in. Again borrowing artists from other managers, RSA put together a bill that included the Moody Blues, who would have a single out that month, plus the Five Dimensions and Long John Baldry. Stigwood added RSA acts Simon Scott and another pretty boy of Indian ancestry, Winston G. This vocalist, whose actual name was Winston Gosh, was a former magician's assistant who'd grabbed the microphone one night when the magician's tricks had gone wrong, and started singing. Coming to London in late 1964, he'd auditioned for Stigwood, who signed him on the spot.

Another RSA act on the Berry tour would be the five-piece Graham Bond Organization (they spelled it with a 'z'). Although Stigwood had always preferred solo artists, encouraged by Komlosy, who saw groups as the future of popular music, he did sign several bands during this period, putting them on £30-a-week retainers. But, as Stigwood later confessed to Simon Napier-Bell, he frequently let them sit around for months while he focused on other things.

The Graham Bond Organization was one band Stigwood used regularly, primarily because Bond himself, a gravel-voiced vocalist, saxophonist and keyboard player, the first to play the Hammond organ in a rock band, according to Stephen Komlosy, who considered him 'brilliant', was amenable and backed RSA's other artists. Bond's band included two players who would one day figure hugely in Stigwood's fortunes, Scottish bassist Jack Bruce and red-headed drummer Peter 'Ginger' Baker. In addition to

backing Winston G. on the Chuck Berry tour, the GBO would also have their own single to promote, 'Wade in the Water', produced by Stigwood on 4 January at Olympic Sound Studios in Baker Street, Barnes in southwest London, and released by EMI to coincide with the tour.

As the Berry bandwagon started rolling in late January, the need for the tour to succeed became even more critical for RSA. The talent agency and videotape sides of the business had unexpectedly dried up after the film technicians' union, the ACTT, took industrial action preventing the airing of videotaped commercials. That setback presaged disaster for RSA. Berry tour audience numbers were poor. Stigwood had miscalculated: Berry's audience was from an older generation. With teenage girls lining up to see the other acts, Berry's fans stayed away.

Worse, when the tour reached Manchester, the Moody Blues demanded a new deal. Their single 'Go Now' had gone to number 1, and the band threatened to quit the tour if they weren't given more money and better billing. Stigwood gave the Moody Blues what they wanted, only for Berry to throw another spanner in the works. Standing at the side of the stage with an open briefcase each night, he demanded payment for his performance before he went on. He'd been burned by white promoters in the US who'd failed to pay him, he said, and was taking precautions against that happening in the UK. Komlosy recalls that, to keep the tour going, he and Stigwood coughed up £1200 a night to Berry.

Meanwhile, Beatles manager Brian Epstein, who relocated the HQ of his firm NEMS (North End Music Stores) from Liverpool to London the same month, was also promoting a January national tour, in his case in partnership with Arthur Howes, with whom he'd put together the Beatles' first British tour in 1963. The Epstein-Howes package was headlined by Epstein's female Liverpoolian star Cilla Black and none other than P. J. Proby. Like Stigwood, Epstein had trouble with Proby. Twice early in the tour, the swivel-hipped Texan split his ultra-tight trousers on stage, delighting teenage girls but incensing their parents. The BBC promptly removed him from their airwaves and ABC Cinemas banned him from their premises. Epstein quickly brought in young Tom Jones to replace Proby. The Epstein tour continued, and prospered.

In contrast, the Chuck Berry tour left RSA up to its armpits in debt. Among RSA's creditors were the Rolling Stones; Stigwood had yet to pay £16,000 owed them for the previous September's tour. Unwisely, Easton,

the Stones co-manager and Stigwood's friend, hadn't pressed for payment. The tour contract had been signed by Easton alone, as his twenty-year-old partner Oldham was under age and legally prevented from entering into contracts. Easton's friendship with Stigwood, and his leniency with him, cost him and the band.

Oldham was furious, but not with Easton: 'Stigwood must have known he was going bankrupt while the Stones were on the road. He could have done the right thing, but he didn't. The Stones had been swindled.'

All up, RSA was in the red to the tune of £39,000. As Komlosy was to say, considering the company's recent turnover and profits, their final debt was measly. Worse, Komlosy had found a way out of the financial hole that RSA found itself in, but Stigwood turned his back on it. 'Sir Joseph Lockwood, Chairman of EMI, had agreed with me to rescue it,' says Komlosy today. Lockwood was proposing an EMI buy-out of RSA, only for the deal to fall through. 'Robert refused to talk to him at the vital last minute.' Komlosy put this down to pride on Stigwood's part. But the Australian had another motive.

Stigwood had come to regret the 1961 deal he'd signed with EMI. RSA's leasing scheme, while innovative, had rewarded it with slim margins. Shrewd, tough as nails Lockwood had screwed the young men over. Recently, Stigwood had learned that a onetime collaborator at EMI, Roland Rennie, was soon to head up the UK operations of international giant Polydor, which was jointly owned by Deutsche Grammophon of West Germany and Philips of the Netherlands. Rennie, who was the same age as Stigwood, had spent twelve years at EMI, crucially managing their licensed repertoire department for the last four before being poached by Transglobal of New York in 1963 to become their president. Polydor was poaching him back to London to shake up their British division.

Polydor had been in the UK since 1954, but was not then a major player. Its sales were to older generations, with artists such as Bert Kaempfert and His Orchestra. Rennie's brief was to broaden Polydor's repertoire, reach and sales, into the teenage market. Meanwhile, Stigwood reasoned that if RSA went under, its contract with EMI would be null and void, and he would be free to follow his friend Rennie to Polydor and negotiate a much more lucrative deal there. He would tell friend Simon Napier-Bell that this foreknowledge of Rennie's move to Polydor had been the reason he failed to accept the Lockwood bailout. While Stigwood was

prepared to let RSA go under so he could start afresh, he left partner Komlosy in the dark about this motive.

‘We struggled on a bit,’ says Komlosy, ‘but were very short of money.’ Before the winter was out, RSA filed for voluntary bankruptcy, and was put into liquidation. Stigwood expected the company’s failure to slip under the radar, but his self-promotion over the past few years had led the world to believe he was a millionaire, a label he’d worn with pride. As a result, his fall came as a shock to the media. ‘My image was bigger than my money,’ Stigwood would admit forty years later. Walking down a London street one afternoon shortly after RSA went under, he saw an *Evening Standard* poster: ‘Top Impresario Bust!’

‘Top?’ he thought to himself, both flattered by the notoriety and dismayed by the publicity. ‘That can’t be me.’

But it was. Only now did it hit him that, at just thirty, his high-flying business had gone under, after he’d garnered such high praise for his entrepreneurship. Stigwood lapsed into depression. ‘I thought I’d failed,’ he said later. How would his super-proud mother and his super-critical father back home in Australia receive the news?

In years to come, Stigwood critics would taunt him with his 1965 descent into bankruptcy. The thing was, he didn’t go bankrupt. Robert Stigwood Associates Limited was put in the hands of receivers, and its assets liquidated. But neither Stigwood nor Komlosy were personally bankrupted by the company’s failure.

Quickly shaking off the shock of his fall, Stigwood set about rebuilding his career. ‘I realised that thirty is a depressing age anyway,’ he would say. To keep up the appearance that he was still a successful music entrepreneur in the eyes of clients and peers, he even arrived at the first RSA receiver’s meeting in a chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce, a hired one. This brought warnings from friends that he should maintain a lower profile. There was no point, they said, in rubbing salt into creditors’ wounds; they might not take kindly to such displays.

After the Scotch of St James opened in 1965, it swiftly became one of London’s most popular and elite nightclubs. The Beatles and Stones had their own tables there, and top musos would frequently jam on stage with visiting artists. The club sat discreetly at the end of a cobbled lane off

Mason's Yard in the belly of St James, just a stone's throw from St James Palace. Its door, with a speakeasy-style spyhole, opened onto a top floor with private rooms. A staircase wound down into the bowels of the earth to a basement housing several rooms, including the main discotheque, a bunker-like space with chairs and tables and a stage fronted by a small dancefloor.

In the early morning hours one day in the spring of 1965, Rolling Stones Mick Jagger and Keith Richards and the band's then co-manager Andrew Oldham and *NME* journalist Keith Altham walked into the club together. With Richards bringing up the rear, the quartet began descending the winding staircase to the basement. Coming up the steps towards them was Stigwood, who smiled weakly. Richards was never one to worry about money, yet the failure of Robert Stigwood Associates to pay the Stones for their September tour had rubbed him the wrong way.

'That bastard owes us sixteen grand!' Richards exclaimed as Jagger, Oldham and Altham passed Stigwood. 'Mick, Andrew, Keith, block his getaway.'

Because the Stones had toured Australia and New Zealand that January-February, and Stigwood was Australian, Altham assumed Richards was talking about that. In fact, that tour had been the sole province of Australian promoter Harry M. Miller. As Altham, Jagger and Oldham stood at the bottom of the stairs, preventing the retreat of the startled Stigwood, Richards began laying into the Aussie with his fists. And then, when the protesting impresario crumpled on the stairs, Richards began kneeling him.

'One fousand! Two fousand!' the Stones' guitarist was snarling with each knee to the gut and genitals, with Stigwood trying to get back to his feet. 'Three fousand! Four fousand!'

'Keith, why do you keep hitting him?' cried an alarmed Altham.

'Because he keeps getting up!' Richards replied.

Richards wasn't satisfied until he'd kneed Stigwood sixteen times. 'One for every grand he owed us,' he would later matter-of-factly explain. He and the others left Stigwood battered and bruised on the stairs. Stigwood would not lay charges against Richards; he didn't want the fact he owed the Stones money spread by London's tabloids while he was trying to rebuild his empire. But neither did the Stones ever receive their money.

Within days of RSA going under, Stigwood registered a new business name, the Robert Stigwood Organisation (RSO), and launched back into business. His new logo retained the intertwined R and S of RSA days, with the A eliminated. ‘The assumption on my part,’ says Komlosy, ‘was that we would form a new company together.’ That didn’t happen. For the time being, Stigwood and Komlosy continued working in partnership. But, as Komlosy now believes, Stigwood already had other ideas for the longer term; ideas that didn’t include him.

Via music industry contacts, Stigwood sweet-talked his way back into business. Friend Peter Walsh, who managed Brian Poole and the Tremeloes among other acts, gave Stigwood and Komlosy space in his Starlite Artists offices in Holborn’s Southampton Row, with the agreement they would develop the younger talent on his books. The pair took five core RSA staff with them to Southampton Row: a secretary and a bookkeeper, as well as Chris Long, manager of the acting agency side of the business, and David Cardwell and Sean Mahoney, the pair who produced *The Beatles Monthly* – Brian Epstein, remaining loyal to Stigwood, let him continue producing the fan mag. Stigwood and Komlosy also took most of their previous RSA clients with them. John Leyton was an exception, finding new management that asked less than Stigwood and Komlosy’s twenty per cent.

Stigwood, aiming to create his own Cilla Black, decided to develop twenty-two-year-old female Liverpool vocalist Nola York. Not only could she sing, Nola wrote her own material, making her a perfect fit with the multifaceted Stigwood formula for success. In March, he told the media he had high hopes for his ‘girl discovery’. Having very quickly made a leasing deal with Polydor’s Roland Rennie, a much better deal than he’d had with EMI, he had Nola record one of her own songs, ‘I Don’t Understand’, for release by Polydor that July. The number failed to chart, as would the next four singles Nola recorded. In 1969, she would join all-girl group the Chantelles.

It was during this period that Simon Napier-Bell was introduced to Stigwood by his friend Vicki Wickham, who booked acts for ITV’s music program *Ready Steady Go!*. Knowing that twenty-five-year-old Napier-Bell, who worked for his father making TV commercials, wanted to get into the

music industry, Wickham felt the connection with Stigwood would be good for him. It was.

Napier-Bell hit it off with Stigwood from their first lunch together, and became his regular after-hours companion. 'Stiggy', as Napier-Bell called Stigwood, would take him to dinner at a good restaurant most nights. Dinner with Stiggy would usually last from 9.00 until midnight, after which the pair adjourned to Stigwood's favourite gambling club, the 21 Room.

Because Napier-Bell wasn't into gambling, by 1.00 am he in turn would drag Stiggy away to one of London's trendier discos, sometimes the Scotch of St James, other times the Cromwellian on Cromwell Road in South Kensington. When these places closed at 3.00, the pair moved on to the more sleazy Soho clubs, often until dawn, before crawling into work. Sometimes, after clubbing, Stigwood would take his friend to RSO's offices for one last bottle of champagne. And whenever Stigwood was distracted on these office visits, Napier-Bell would scan his desk contents, trying to learn as much as he could about the music business. His 'spying' would before long pay dividends.

One Friday, three months into the new RSO regime, Stigwood didn't come into the office until lunchtime. This was unusual for him. It was payday for RSO's staff, and as they waited for their pay packets Komlosy found that Stigwood avoided him so pointedly he began to suspect something was up. Confronting Stigwood, Komlosy demanded to know what was going on. Sheepishly, his partner admitted that, after collecting £400 commission from Graham Bond the previous evening, money that was to be used to pay RSO wages that day, he'd taken it to a gambling club, and lost the lot.

For Komlosy, this was the last straw. The twenty-two-year-old walked out. 'I split from Bob because he blew the staff wages at the 21 Room,' he says. 'It seemed that he had learned nothing from the collapse of RSA and the cavalier way we had run it.' Komlosy would continue to work in the artist management field for some time. Several RSO acts followed him, including, briefly, the Graham Bond Organization.

Later, Komlosy would manage former Larry Parnes client Lionel Bart, a songwriter with hits including 'Living Doll' for Cliff Richard and 'Little White Bull' for Tommy Steele, before creating the super-successful stage musical *Oliver*, based on Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*.

Despite their falling out, Komlosy would always remember Stigwood and their years in business together with affection. 'He's a genius,' he said forty-five years after their partnership ended. 'He is immensely charming and funny and nice.' Today, he says, 'I am grateful to him for his instructive mentoring in the ways of business and life.'

So, now, Stigwood was on his own. The previous year, Komlosy had urged him to emulate Epstein, Walsh and others by finding good groups to manage and letting go his obsession with solo singers. 'We were a year behind,' Komlosy says. Groups were dominating the record charts. They were the main course, while solo acts had become the dessert.

In mid-1965, Stigwood commenced the overdue quest for band talent by taking on a group that had just changed its name from the Reaction to the Hamilton Movement, with handsome teen lead singer Gary Laub using the stage name Gary Hamilton. There was no contractual arrangement, just a handshake, as Stigwood took the Hamilton Movement into Regent Sound in Denmark Street to record two demo tracks for a potential single. For the A-side, Stigwood insisted they play a number he provided, 'Really Saying Something'. He let them record their own selection, 'I Won't See You Tonight', for the B-side.

Stigwood took these tracks to Polydor, coming back with the news that Roland Rennie wanted more professional recordings. Taking the band to Olympic Studios, the Rolling Stones' favourite recording venue, Stigwood brought in Graham Bond to play piano. He was killing two birds with one stone, creating a fuller sound for the Hamilton Movement and bringing Bond back into the Stigwood fold.

Stigwood then produced a Graham Bond Organization single, 'Lease on Love'. Although the first-ever pop song featuring a mellotron, it failed to make an impression on the charts when it was released that July. Meanwhile, GBO's Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker were often fighting like wild animals. In August, deputised by Bond, Baker fired Bruce.

But the Scot wouldn't accept the sacking, and kept turning up for GBO rehearsals. 'Until Ginger pulled a knife on me,' Bruce would recall. Bruce subsequently joined Manfred Mann, playing on their number 1 hit 'Pretty Flamingo'. The Hamilton Movement's single featuring Bond was also released in July. It would peak at 53 on the charts of Radio Caroline, the shipboard pirate station that had finally brought commercial radio to British airwaves.

Despite the lack of chart success, all this activity convinced a financial backer to get behind Stigwood. David Shaw was a young City financier. Small, nervous Shaw had run an investment firm, Constellation, which specialised in limiting tax liabilities for members of the entertainment industry, getting around Britain's then high tax regime. He'd been forced to fold Constellation after the government closed the tax loophole that had enabled it to prosper. Although he was on the nose in establishment quarters over a bond-washing scandal he'd been linked with, Shaw had access to money, and believed in Stigwood.

Equally, Stigwood was unfazed by Shaw's bad press. It was a case of two negatives combining to create a positive. Looking back, Stephen Komlosy feels that the Australian was probably already negotiating with Shaw behind his back shortly after the collapse of RSA. It seems likely that Stigwood contrived to lose the Graham Bond money as a means of forcing Komlosy's walkout, bringing about a termination of their business relationship and opening the door to the arrangement with Shaw.

Bringing in investor Andrew Gordon to co-finance the venture, Shaw initially put up £25,000 to get Stigwood going again. On 8 September 1965, The Robert Stigwood Organisation Limited (RSO) was registered as a company, with Stigwood owning 50 per cent and Shaw and Gordon the balance, and Stigwood took offices in New Cavendish Street. Early in the new year, Shaw would put in another £15,000. The cash came with a wise proviso. Knowing of Stigwood's reputation as a gambler, Shaw joined RSO as its chief financial officer, with all company expenditure to be signed off by him. Among his fiscal measures was a decree that there would be no chauffeur-driven company cars, let alone a Bentley. Shaw's involvement would prove a solid foundation for the remaking of Robert Stigwood.

ACT TWO

The Remaking of Robert

8.

Cream of the Crop

‘Stigwood probably had no idea what we were doing, either.’

Eric Clapton

EVEN BEFORE RSO Ltd was up and running, in August 1965 Stigwood made a very astute investment. He'd become close friends with Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp, who managed the Who, and was in fact now sharing a large duplex flat in Waldon Court with Stamp, brother of actor Terence Stamp. Stigwood sublet New Cavendish Street office space to Lambert and Stamp, giving them the office right next door to his, and paid them £500 to become the Who's booking agent. Compared with what he would make out of the Who over the next few years, this was peanuts. Stigwood then organised a one-off 30 August stadium gig for the Who, the Merseybeats, Graham Bond Organization and Hamilton Movement at Cardiff's Sophia Gardens Pavilion in Wales. The gig went well, and made money. Stigwood was back in the game.

Despite the fact he was living under the same roof as Stamp, Stigwood went to great lengths to hide the extent of his former RSA financial troubles from Stamp and Lambert, as he had from everyone else he now worked with. Unsecured creditors like Andrew Oldham regularly rang demanding he at least make an effort to pay them, threatening to sue for his personal bankruptcy if he didn't. While Stigwood tried to maintain the image of a successful entrepreneur for the sake of clients and business associates, he would assure creditors that it would be pointless bankrupting him personally, as it would cost them more than they made from the exercise. ‘The truth was that Stiggy was flat broke,’ Simon Napier-Bell later revealed.

Stamp and Lambert began to wonder what Stigwood was up to when he closed his office door to take certain calls. Cheekily, the pair crawled along

the wide continuous ledge that ran beneath the windows of their adjoining offices, and listened in. When they subsequently revealed to him what they'd learned about a particular debt, Stigwood was red-faced with embarrassment. They swore they'd overheard him through the wall of their adjoining offices, and to prove it they sent Stigwood into their office while Stamp made a call from Stigwood's phone. Standing by the wall, Stamp yelled at the top of his voice, and Stigwood was fooled, twice subsequently moving his desk, and talking in a whisper on confidential calls. Finally, Stamp and Lambert could contain their mirth no longer, and revealed their secret.

Within a month of establishing RSO Ltd, Stigwood secured a spot on *Ready Steady Go!* for the Hamilton Movement. Artists appearing on the show initially lipsynced to their records, but, following intervention from the Musicians Union, all performances after April 1965 were live, with artists taped with the backing of an orchestra in Rediffusion's Wembley TV studio. The other members of the Hamilton Movement were unhappy when only Laub was shown, singing like a solo artist with the orchestra, in a show that also included the Rolling Stones, Animals and Searchers, all in their full line-ups. The other members of the Hamilton Movement had to be content being part of the studio audience. When Simon Scott appeared solo on *Ready Steady Go!* it was likewise without his backing band the Le Roys. Stigwood still preferred solo acts.

He sent the Hamilton Movement on a short English tour the following February, on a bill that included the Who, Merseybeats, Fortunes, Graham Bond Organization and new Stigwood signing Screaming Lord Sutch and the Savages. Stigwood and Kit Lambert, who were increasingly in each other's company, turned up at Hamilton Movement tour rehearsals to give stage presentation tips.

In the new year, with David Shaw's additional investment, Stigwood further increased his foothold in the record business by establishing his own label, Reaction Records, which would be distributed by Polydor. He'd won support from Polydor bigwig Horst Schmaltzy, who flew in from the company's Hamburg HQ, sealing the deal during a night out at the Scotch of St James. Polydor would provide the last link in the chain, distribution

into record stores throughout the land. The rest was Stigwood's responsibility.

As Reaction's pioneer act, Stigwood snaffled the Who. They already had a record deal, with American producer Shel Talmy, who'd released their first LP *My Generation*, featuring the hit single of the same name, on Decca, for whom it had gone to number 5 on the UK album charts. Despite that success the band wanted out of their contract with the manipulative American, and managers Stamp and Lambert thought they'd found the legal loophole that would achieve it – the band members had been under age when they signed with Talmy's Orbit Music. Under English law, their legal guardians should have signed on their behalf.

So, on 12 February, at Olympic Studios, the Who recorded 'Substitute'. Written by their guitarist Pete Townshend, this would be the A-side for Reaction's first single. The B-side was another Townshend composition, 'Instant Party'. After Polydor shipped 50,000 records throughout the UK for 4 March release, radio picked up 'Substitute' and sales took off. What Stigwood didn't know was that the Who had previously recorded a version of 'Instant Party' for Talmy, which had never been released.

Three days after the single's release, Talmy secured an injunction to prevent the record's further sale while his claim of copyright infringement was heard. The following day, while Polydor went to court to fight the action, Decca released its own Who single, a track from their first album, titled, ironically or deliberately, 'A Legal Matter', with Talmy's version of 'Instant Party' on the B-side. Once again in the music wars, Stigwood calmly, cleverly counter-attacked. With the Who on tour promoting 'Substitute', he called in the Graham Bond Organization to record a hurried Townshend composition as a new B-side, 'Waltz for a Pig', under the name the Who Orchestra. This session would be the GBO's last performance with its current line-up; the band disintegrated within days.

Ten days after 'Substitute's original release, Polydor rushed the new Reaction version into stores with 'Waltz for a Pig' on the reverse. With neither Talmy nor Decca able to stop this, 'Substitute' went to number 5 in the UK for Reaction, occupying the charts for weeks.

The under-age legal argument subsequently enabled the separation from Talmy, and the Who became a Reaction act, with the blaze of publicity surrounding the original dispute working in favour of Stigwood and the group. The music industry was buzzing with the success of 'Substitute' and

Stigwood's counter to Talmy's attempt to scupper Reaction. A colleague of Simon Napier-Bell commented to him, 'Maybe Stiggy's got his magic touch back.'

As Stigwood went looking for his next hit, he was introduced to a forty-three-year-old Turkish-American who would help shape his future. Ahmet Ertegun had co-founded Atlantic Records in one large room on Manhattan's West 57th Street in 1947. By day, the room was occupied by desks. By night, with office furniture pushed back against the wall, the room became a recording studio. From a tiny control booth in the corner, Ertegun and Atlantic's first employee, Tom Dowd, produced the records of black artists talent-spotted by Ertegun: Wilson Pickett, Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles and Otis Redding among them. Ertegun's partner from 1953, Jerry Wexler, even coined the term 'rhythm and blues'. By the beginning of 1966, Atlantic was a major force in the US music business, and seeking a British distributor.

Bald, bespectacled, swarthy Ertegun looked like a well-dressed Eastern European used-car salesman: looks that belied his sharp mind and quick wit. He had a nose for the music business, and an ear for soul music. On a scouting trip to London, Ertegun visited British record companies looking for a fit. It was Roland Rennie's Polydor operation that impressed him most, and Rennie suggested that Ertegun also talk with the Australian who had just launched his own label through Polydor. Ertegun and Stigwood hit it off as soon as they met. Together, they were like a pair of naughty schoolboys. When Stigwood took the American clubbing, Ertegun matched him drink for drink, joke for joke, bet for bet. Like Stigwood, Ertegun smoked like a chimney and thought nothing of partying until dawn.

Deciding to link up with Polydor, Ertegun flew to Hamburg to meet with Polydor's chiefs and finalise an agreement. Atlantic's deal, which came into effect on 1 April that year, also allowed Atlantic to distribute Polydor UK product in the US. This extended to Stigwood's Reaction records, enabling the Who to soon rack up big 'Substitute' sales on Atlantic's Atco label in America, where it went to number 14. Meanwhile, Stigwood flew to New York and enjoyed the hospitality of Ertegun and his wife. Before long, Ahmet and Mica Ertegun were like his brother and sister.

Ertegun taught Stigwood about the American market. He also taught him how to enjoy money. Just a year after this, Ertegun and his partners,

brother Nesuhi and Jerry Wexler, would sell Atlantic to Warner Bros-Seven Arts, with Ertegun and Wexler staying on to run the business. At the height of his success, Ertegun had his clothes tailored on London's Saville Row, his shoes handmade in Paris. For fun he had a classic Bentley, Sunbeam and Rolls-Royce. For business he had two chauffeur-driven Cadillac Fleetwoods. He had a five-floor townhouse on Manhattan's Upper East Side, a weekender at Shinnecock Bay in the Hamptons and a summer house at Bodrum in his native Turkey. A large art collection including works by Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Henri Matisse adorned his walls.

Said Ertegun to Stigwood about his trio of homes: 'Oscar Wilde once said that three addresses always inspires confidence.' Ertegun also said he knew he was a success when he never had to carry keys. Employees opened the door to his office, his homes, his cars, his jet. One day, Stigwood, too, would be keyless.

In a Soho pub, Winston G. was enjoying a drink with friends when his manager Robert Stigwood walked in. Winston introduced Stigwood to his friends, Ronnie Harwood and Paul Beuselinck. Harwood's links with Winston went back several years, to when he'd played in his then backing band, the Wicked. Stigwood knew both Harwood and Beuselinck by sight, as they'd more recently played in Screaming Lord Sutch's Savages. Now, he warmed to them, particularly to blond Beuselinck, whose stage name was then Paul Dean. 'Robert was a nice guy,' says Ronnie Harwood. 'He took Paul and I away for a weekend in Paris. A great time we had.'

Handsome Beuselinck played keyboards, possessed a good singing voice and had a bright personality. He was the perfect package in the opinion of Stigwood, who determined to turn him into his next solo star. Taking Paul into the studio, he had him record a single, 'She Can Build a Mountain', which was released as Reaction's second single under Beuselinck's stage name. When it went nowhere,

Stigwood called the youngster back into the studio to record new tracks for another single, to be released, he decreed, under a new pseudonym.

'What's your middle name?' Stigwood asked as they played around with potential names.

'Oscar,' Paul replied.

'Perfect.'

Paul's second and Reaction's third release, 'Club of Lights', would go out under the name Oscar. When Stigwood played the finished track to Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp, they said Oscar was woefully out of tune. After he took Paul into the studio to re-record the number, Lambert and Stamp revealed they'd been pulling his leg.

A few weeks after 'Club of Lights' was put down a second time, Stigwood decided he would pay for a short break for Lambert, Stamp and himself in exotic Morocco. Telling Lambert to make the booking, he gave him the money. Lambert, who was perennially broke, used the money to pay the Who, and Stigwood had to fork out a second time. After flying to Gibraltar, the trio took a ferry across the strait to Tangiers.

After they landed in Morocco and climbed into a taxi, Lambert instructed the driver, 'Take us to a male brothel at once!'

Stigwood was so embarrassed by his companions, he changed hotels and sampled the nightlife alone. Early the next morning, Lambert and Stamp snuck into his hotel room and emptied his wallet. On the getaway's last night, the three of them stayed at Gibraltar's posh Rock Hotel, and when Stigwood went to join the other two for dinner they flatly denied knowing him and had the manager remove him.

Stigwood, who never seems to have held these pranks against his friends, arrived back in the London office in time for the launch of 'Club of Lights'. To his bitter disappointment, the single died. Yet, stubbornly, he remained determined to turn Oscar into a star.

The Hamilton Movement went on an April tour with Jimmy Cliff and the Sound System, and the Spencer Davis Group, whose lead vocalist was Steve Winwood. Seven months later, the Spencer Davis Group, managed by Chris Blackwell, would release 'Keep on Running' on Blackwell's new Island Records label. Going to number 1 in the UK, the hit would establish Island for Blackwell. Two years later, Winwood would form Traffic, and another two years after that both he and Blackwell would feature in a brief but significant highlight in Stigwood's career.

On the Hamilton Movement's return from this tour, Stigwood sent them into the studio, with Graham Bond again playing backing piano. When Stigwood gave them the Who's 'A Legal Matter' to play, they turned up their noses. Giving them another number to learn, Stigwood left them to it.

The band members didn't much like that one, either, and drummer Fedon Tilberis struggled with the drum part. Giving up on Stigwood's choice, the group worked on a song of their own, which they played to him on his return.

'Bob was well peeved,' drummer Tilberis was to say, 'but he let us play.' Shaking his head, Stigwood then departed. 'Bob gave us the thumbs down. We were out, and the gig flow stopped.' Apart from a short August tour, the band would receive no more bookings from RSO, and would soon fold. The experience was a salutary lesson for the band members, and a signal of Stigwood's management philosophy: give him what he wanted, or forget it.

One Friday night in May, the Who had a gig at Newbury's popular Ricky Tick Club. Because Keith Moon and John Entwistle didn't arrive on time, Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend began the set without them, using the rhythm section from support act the Jimmy Brown Sound in place of Moon and Entwistle. When the missing pair did arrive, they'd clearly been drinking heavily and popping pills. As the band played on, drummer and bassist took their places on stage, but things were tense between group members.

Playing out their last number, 'My Generation', Moon typically kicked his drums over, but this night the sharp edge of a cymbal caught Townshend on the leg. Townshend, in the process of crashing his guitar into his amp as usual, collected Moon on the head. Blood and curses flowed. The curtain quickly came down.

'Fuck this!' exclaimed Moon and Entwistle. 'We're leaving the band!' They set off to find Kit Lambert to tell him they were quitting. It was Saturday morning by the time someone told the pair that Lambert went over to Stigwood's place every Saturday to watch the horse races on TV and bet. At Stigwood's flat, Moon kicked in a window, and he and Entwistle burst into the bedroom, to find Stigwood and Lambert in bed together. Blushing like schoolgirls, the naked pair pulled the bed sheet up around themselves.

Lambert and Stigwood were subsequently able to convince Moon and Entwistle not to leave the band, with Stigwood calming the waters by promising to release a new Who single on Reaction in the summer. The band went back into the studio in late July, once drummer Moon's ankle,

fractured while kicking in Stigwood's window, had healed. On 26 August, the Who's 'I'm a Boy' became Reaction's fourth single release. It went to number 1.

More Reaction singles hit the shops that summer. The first was 'Say Those Magic Words', a cover of a McCoys American hit by a newly signed group. With future Jeff Beck Group, Faces and Rolling Stones member Ronnie Wood on vocals and guitar, this five-piece band had been the Birds until US group the Byrds arrived in the UK for a tour promoting their international hit 'Mr Tambourine Man'. After the Birds' previous manager Leo de Clerk had failed in a legal action to get the Byrds to change their name, the band had switched to RSO's management. Stigwood told them to change their name to the Birds Birds. 'It didn't make sense to me, or to any of us,' Ronnie Wood said later.

Stigwood was supremely confident. 'You're with new management now,' he told them, assuring band members the name change would lead to wonderful things. 'Believe me. Trust me.' So they did, and became the Birds Birds.

'Robert had a great sense of humour and I liked him a lot,' Wood would say. 'He was always plotting mad schemes and flirting with the pretty-boy actors he managed alongside us, or trying it on with our bass player, Kim [Gardner].' The Birds Birds' single went nowhere. The band would stay with Stigwood until early in the new year, then split up.

In need of more Reaction hits, Stigwood turned his attention to the Small Faces, who'd recently had several big sellers on Decca. From industry contacts, Stigwood had heard the band was unhappy with their current manager, bully boy Don Arden. Eric Burdon and the Animals had recently left Arden, and Stigwood rashly wondered if the Small Faces could be convinced to do the same. Knowing that Small Faces members shared a house in Pimlico, which was rented for them by Arden, Stigwood boldly knocked on the door one night a little after midnight.

Only lead singer Steve Marriott and drummer Kenney Jones were home, but they invited Stigwood in for a drink. The trio chatted for thirty minutes, before Stigwood got up to go. At the door, he came to the point. 'You should get a new manager, and I'd like to be that guy. Why don't you come in and see me in my office some time?'

After Stigwood departed, Marriott and Jones debated what to do. Both would have happily gone over to Stigwood, but were terrified of Don

Arden's reaction. After the Animals' defection, they were convinced Arden would probably kill them, or at least maim them for life, even if he learned they'd merely been talking to Stigwood. Next day, they rang Arden and told him about Stigwood's visit, assuring him it had been the Australian who'd raised the subject of changing management.

Arden decided to make an example of Stigwood. One of his regular bouncers recruited ten burly extras then working with him on Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton's *Cleopatra* at Shepperton Studios, and, with this gang in tow, Arden turned up at RSO's New Cavendish Street offices. After locking the door and taking over the phones, Arden ordered Stigwood's staff to stay put, then barged into their boss's office with several henchmen.

'Don!' said Stigwood from behind his desk, looking scared. 'What a pleasant surprise.'

'Cut the shit,' Arden snarled. 'You know why I'm here.'

'The Faces?'

Telling Stigwood he should build his own acts and not try stealing them, Arden walked around the desk and demanded a guarantee he would never try on anything like this with him again.

'No, Don,' Stigwood quickly replied. 'Absolutely not.'

'Because, if you do, this is what's going to happen to you.' It being a warm summer day, the tall office window, which led onto an ornate balcony, was open for fresh air. Lifting Stigwood from his chair, Arden dragged him to the window and shoved his head over the balcony rail, looking down at the street below. 'That's where you're going the next time you fuck with me.'

According to Arden, one of his goons shouted, 'Fuck next time!'

A bunch of them rushed forward, grabbed Stigwood from Arden, and to reinforce the point, dangled him over the balcony by his ankles. When they dragged him back into the room, Arden reckoned Stigwood was rigid with fear. Leaving him lying on the floor, Arden and his chuckling cohorts departed. Before long, the police called on Arden. He denied everything, and in the end Stigwood didn't press charges. Neither did Stigwood again attempt to poach an act from his combative competitor.

Desperate for another hit, Stigwood tried again with Paul Beuselinck. This time he recorded an album of romantic songs *à la* Frank Sinatra, and a new Oscar single, 'Join My Gang', written by Pete Townshend. Oscar's romantic album would never be released. 'It was philanthropic of Robert to indulge me,' Paul later said, 'but we still had hopes for a hit with "Join My Gang".' Stigwood hired a record plugger to promote the single to the music media, and Beuselinck himself was prepared to do just about anything for publicity, even contemplating marrying on an ocean liner.

Ultimately, Stigwood revisited an old idea, distributing plaster busts of his new star to the media. These, he said, were his Oscars. And, as had been the case with the Simon Scott busts, his Oscars were ridiculed. 'Join My Gang' went nowhere. 'It's a witty song,' the number's composer Pete Townshend said years later, 'and I was sad it wasn't a hit. David Bowie, then unknown, stopped me in the street in Victoria and told me he liked it.'

Despite yet another Oscar flop, Stigwood refused to give up on his new favourite.

That summer, led by former Graham Bond Organization drummer Ginger Baker, three musicians walked into Stigwood's office. Baker was followed by GBO and Manfred Mann bass player Jack Bruce and twenty-year-old guitarist and vocalist Eric Clapton. Previously a member of the Yardbirds, Clapton had just quit John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers.

From behind his desk, Stigwood greeted the trio warmly. Wearing a dark blazer, grey slacks, light blue shirt and a smattering of gold, he looked the epitome of the man of leisure. As they shook hands, he introduced himself to Clapton not as Bob, but as Robert. Bob Stigwood, like RSA, was dead. In the new regime, every RSO client and employee, right down to the office boy, was now told by Stigwood to address him as Robert.

Despite this egalitarian outlook, to Clapton, who knew the manager was Australian, Stigwood seemed to be trying to pass himself off as a wealthy Englishman. 'He launched into a very confident monologue,' Clapton would recall, 'telling us all the things he could do for us and how wonderful our lives were going to be.'

Baker, Bruce and Clapton had decided to form a band. It had started in February, when Clapton was playing a Bluesbreakers gig in Oxford. Ginger Baker had been in the audience, and he'd offered Clapton a ride home to

London. En route, Baker proposed they get together. Clapton, ready to move to a group where he could play a role in deciding its material, showed interest, urging Baker to bring Bruce on board.

Jack Bruce had been classically trained, on the cello, at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music, before being kicked out for moonlighting in a dance band. Clapton considered him the most forceful, creative bass player he'd ever seen. Because of his tempestuous past with Bruce, Baker resisted involving the Scot, just as he resisted Clapton's other suggestion, that they bring in Steve Winwood to fill out their sound. Eventually, Baker had approached Bruce, on condition Clapton agree to them working as a trio.

In March, the three of them had come together in the front room of Baker's then house in Neasden. Baker and Bruce had bickered almost immediately, but once the three of them played a few numbers together acoustically, they looked at each other and grinned, the way musos do when they know something is working, beautifully, magically. When they played electrically, Clapton wasn't so sure, feeling the need for extra instrumentation. But the others were convinced. Over the next couple of months, they'd rehearsed in secret until they agreed they were ready to play in public.

'Let's go see Stigboot,' Baker had then said. Stigboot was his nickname for his former manager. While Clapton was fine with hooking up with Stigwood, Bruce was against it, suggesting they manage themselves. But neither Baker nor Clapton wanted to worry about chasing gigs, browbeating venue managers for money or scanning the fine print of contracts, and they dragged a reluctant Bruce along to the meeting at RSO.

Stigwood agreed to take them on immediately, without hearing them play, and even though the three of them didn't have a precise idea what musical direction they would take. Little did they know that he was desperate for a new band to release on Reaction. 'Stigwood probably had no idea what we were doing, either,' Clapton would later reflect. 'The whole project was a colossal gamble.'

Stigwood was drawn to gambles. And the odds were good. He was familiar with Baker and Bruce's work, and knew of Clapton's talent by repute. So, Stigwood promised his new band the world. 'It sounded like a lot of flannel to me,' Clapton would say. But he immediately liked Stigwood's flair and vision. 'I think in some ways he truly understood us. It took me a while to tumble to the fact that he was partial to good-looking

guys, but I had no problem with that, and in fact it made him appear rather vulnerable and very human to me.'

The trio placed themselves under Stigwood's management. To this point they still didn't have a name. A myth would grow that Stigwood both handpicked the new band's members and gave them their name. He did neither. Just as Baker and Clapton had determined the band's make-up, it was Clapton who suggested their name. 'I came up with Cream,' he would say, 'for the very simple reason that in all our minds we were the cream of the crop.' Initially, they would be The Cream, but before long 'The' would be dropped.

While the band continued rehearsing, Stigwood mapped out their launch. He began by calling in affable Irishman Bill Gaff, one of RSO's booking agents, who negotiated gigs for Stigwood's acts with venue owners and promoters. To Gaff's surprise, Stigwood offered him the job of Cream's tour manager. This rocked Gaff, who protested that he'd never even been on the road with a band. What, he asked, would the job actually entail?

Stigwood paused, then said, 'Have you ever looked after children?'

Gaff declined the job. Later, he would leave RSO and manage the Faces.

Cream's first big gig was a slot Stigwood organised for them, along with the Who, at the National Jazz and Blues Festival at Windsor Racecourse on 31 July, preceded by a warm-up show two days earlier at Manchester's Twisted Wheel.

At the Windsor Festival, as a late inclusion to the bill Cream came on last, playing, initially nervously, to a crowd of 15,000. Clapton had changed his style to try to fill out their sound. Instead of dropping in and out with guitar licks, he was now playing a lot of bar chords and hitting open strings to create a background to his lead guitar inserts. When Jack Bruce wasn't in perfect synchronisation with Baker's drum playing, he played his bass as if it were a lead guitar. And Ginger, considered the mad, red-bearded genius of the drum world, would stun audiences and fellow musicians by using a pair of bass drums (most drummers only used one), and performing mesmerising twenty-minute drum solos. For their Windsor set, the band only had three numbers down pat. After playing each number, twice, they

just jammed. The crowd went wild. So too did the music press, which pronounced the arrival of the world's first 'supergroup'.

In early August, Stigwood rushed Cream into a Chalk Farm recording studio in London's northeast to put down their first single. It was 'Wrapping Paper', with music by Bruce and lyrics by his friend Peter Brown, member of an undistinguished band called the Battered Ornaments. Neither Baker nor Clapton much liked 'Wrapping Paper', but Stigwood convinced them to go with it. Released as Reaction's seventh single in October, with 'Cat's Squirrel' the B-side, it would only reach number 34 in Britain. But the band's artistry had won huge cred with, and admiration from, fellow musos.

Most importantly, Stigwood had confidence in the trio. He admired Clapton's artistry, and had a strange, indulgent rapport with Ginger Baker, as Ronnie Wood came to witness. The Birds Birds were still together at this point, and Wood loved going into the RSO offices for meetings with Stigwood, mostly because they could rub shoulders with the likes of Cream, whose members Wood already considered stars. On one visit to New Cavendish Street, Wood saw Ginger Baker go up to Stigwood in the outer office.

'I hate that tie you're wearing,' said Baker to Stigwood. Grabbing a pair of scissors from the nearest desk, the drummer cut his manager's tie in half.

Stigwood had big plans for Cream. Even before the release of 'Wrapping Paper' he had Baker, Bruce and Clapton back in the studio in September to record numbers for both an album and a follow-up single to be released almost simultaneously in December. This time, the session was in the tiny Ryemuse Studios, above a pharmacy in South Molton Street, using a two-track Ampex tape recorder. And, as with most of their recordings, the group overdubbed to make their sound richer, with Clapton playing rhythm on one track to supplement his lead guitar riffs, and Bruce on keyboard.

For their next single, Stigwood chose 'NSU' as the B-side, and, for the A-side, 'I Feel Free', a Bruce/Brown composition with a driving beat. On the disc itself, Stigwood would claim sole credit as the track's producer, but in reality it was a collegiate effort between him, sound engineer John Timperley and the band members. Clapton came away from this session happy that here was a number that truly reflected what Cream was all about. The world was about to agree.

9.

Getting into Bed with Brian Epstein

‘Well, he’s nervous too.’

Brian Epstein

THE SAME SEPTEMBER that Stigwood produced Cream’s first album and second single, he secretly made his greatest business coup to date. Early that month, he invited Brian Epstein over to one of the regular Saturday night parties he threw at Waldon Court. Epstein was a private individual who, to hide his homosexuality, was rarely seen at the brash Stigwood-style party attended by many in the music business. His socialising was low-key, intimate. But this particular Saturday, Stigwood wanted to discuss business.

So, Epstein came along to talk, accompanied by the pin-striped Peter Brown. Not the Battered Ornaments songwriter, this Peter Brown was a tall, well dressed, neatly bearded and gay former Liverpool shop assistant whom Epstein had brought to London when NEMS moved to the capital. Calm, quiet and laid-back, he was Epstein’s right-hand man, his fixer.

As the Waldon Court party raged, Epstein, or ‘Eppy’ as his number-one clients the Beatles called him, lent Stigwood an ear. Stigwood wanted RSO to become European representative of NEMS. But Epstein had other ideas. He suggested the pair fly to Paris the following weekend, accompanied by Epstein’s man Brown and Stigwood’s man David Shaw, to talk in private. To cover the real intent of the outing, Shaw would describe the trip as a dirty weekend. It may have ended up that way, but to begin with it was all about business.

The following Saturday, as they talked things through in a three-bedroom suite at Paris’ Lancaster Hotel, Epstein revealed he was tired of the business and wanted out. His idea of heaven, he said, was settling in Spain and making a movie about matadors, one of his passions. Epstein was spending a lot of time in Spain, where he’d even taken on the management

of an aspiring matador, an Englishman. Epstein now proposed that Stigwood merge his operations with NEMS, with Stigwood buying a controlling 51 per cent. Epstein would step back, become chairman, and let Stigwood run things. This way, Cream, soon to be Stigwood's big money-maker, would become a NEMS act, and Stigwood would profit from the Beatles' spectacular earning power. In theory, it was a marriage made in music heaven.

Stigwood was initially surprised, but on reflection could see why Epstein had chosen him as his heir apparent. Both were thirty-two, with the Australian the elder by just five months. And both had bucked Britain's establishment to get where they were, being young, gay and outsiders: Epstein the Jew from Liverpool, Stigwood the upstart from the colonies. But the proposed merger's financial side was tricky. Two years back, an American conglomerate had offered Epstein \$20 million for NEMS. Epstein had turned down that offer, primarily because it would have meant surrendering all involvement with the Beatles, something neither he nor the Beatles then wanted. While \$20 million was a massive sum, and Stigwood had access to nowhere near that sort of money, by the autumn of 1966 such a valuation of NEMS was looking decidedly inflated.

For one thing, Epstein had bungled the Beatles' US merchandising. NEMS had lost a \$5 million lawsuit in New York, was facing another worth \$22 million, and had lost tens of millions of dollars in Beatles merchandising contracts. By Peter Brown's estimation, the fiasco had cost the Beatles \$100 million in lost merchandising revenue. And then there was the future of NEMS' prime asset, the Beatles themselves. Their management contract with NEMS would expire in thirteen months, and while it was presumed they would re-sign, there was no guarantee they would. Besides, they had already stopped touring, and with pop groups frequently breaking up, a question mark hung over how long John, Paul, George and Ringo would continue recording and making money for NEMS. As David Shaw told Stigwood, NEMS was such a questionable investment no staid British banker would lend him, or anyone else, the money to buy it.

Still, Stigwood was confident that, if he could run NEMS for a while, he could build the business, and build confidence in it, to such an extent that he would be able to raise the capital to acquire it. So he and Epstein struck a deal. The merger would take place almost at once, with Stigwood given the option to buy 51 per cent of the company by May 1967 for £500,000. They

signed the deal on 30 September, but both parties agreed to keep it secret until Epstein could break the news gently to the Beatles, who owned 10 per cent of NEMS, as well as his other key acts, and his employees. For Epstein knew that some in his world would not take a Stigwood takeover well.

The deal hit its first speed bump when Epstein spoke with the Beatles. Fifty years later, Paul McCartney would reveal that he and his fellow mop-tops were violently opposed to being taken over by Stigwood. This was not, as some would interpret it, because they disliked Stigwood. Rather, it was because they loved, and trusted, Epstein. Having come this far with Eppy, they refused to let him dump them now. McCartney, who was beginning to assert himself as the group's business spokesman, told Epstein that if the merger went ahead as planned, 'We will record "God Save the Queen" for every single record we make from now on, and we'll sing it out of tune.'

In the end, the group acquiesced to Stigwood's buy-in, but only when Epstein agreed to continue personally managing their careers. After giving the same undertaking to Cilla Black, Epstein proposed a modified buy-out deal to Stigwood: other than the fact he would continue managing the Beatles and Cilla, everything would remain the same. Stigwood agreed without hesitation. As he revealed to his nephew Ron years later, he was never a big fan of the Beatles' music anyway. Besides, 'Fab Four' and Cilla Black earnings would still be coming into NEMS, yet Epstein would continue to have the headache of managing their massive egos. For Stigwood, this made the deal even sweeter.

It would not be until January that the merger was officially announced, for Epstein had a lot of work to do within NEMS' ranks, knowing that several of his senior people would be dead against it. In fact, NEMS director Vic Lewis foamed at the mouth at the idea. Lewis, a pudgy, moustachioed former orchestra leader turned concert promoter and management agent, had sold his Vic Lewis Organisation to NEMS only the previous January. That deal had brought Lewis clients including Petula Clark, Donovan and Matt Munro onto Epstein's roster, without giving Lewis a single share in the company. Compared to Stigwood's contracted 51 per cent shareholding, that had been a very poor deal on Lewis' part. Nonetheless, Lewis felt that if anyone was going to replace Epstein, it should be him.

Peter Brown was not a Stigwood fan either, although he kept this to himself. As Brown later revealed, he was unimpressed by the Australian's 'grandiose lifestyle'. And he was under the false impression that Stigwood was an undischarged bankrupt; although, how Brown thought he could possibly be a director of another company, especially the high-profile Robert Stigwood Organisation Ltd and now NEMS Ltd, while an undischarged bankrupt, is baffling. Certainly, the liquidation of RSA Ltd was still dragging through the courts, but that had no effect on Stigwood's personal financial standing.

For reasons undisclosed, the third member of the triumvirate sitting directly beneath Epstein in the NEMS hierarchy, Geoffrey Ellis, an Oxford-educated lawyer, despised Stigwood. And Epstein knew it. Epstein only told Ellis about the merger four days before it was announced to all NEMS staff. As if to soften the blow, he gave Ellis an expensive white gold wristwatch as an early Christmas gift. Ellis was so embittered, he gave the watch away. 'I, like everyone else at NEMS without exception, was surprised and distressed,' Ellis would say. Ellis's distress was about to be compounded.

The night before the merger's announcement to Epstein's lower-ranking staff, Stigwood and David Shaw snuck into the NEMS offices. Located in Sutherland House at 5-6 Argyll Street, the NEMS HQ sat right next door to the London Palladium, its sixty staff occupying the fifth floor. On Epstein's instructions, Peter Brown showed Stigwood and Shaw around as they chose where to locate the RSO staffers who would come with them in the merger. For himself, Stigwood chose Geoffrey Ellis's office. Shaw claimed the smaller office of Ellis's secretary. Stigwood shortly after apologised to Ellis for taking his office, and Ellis would later say, sniffily, 'I was content to occupy a perfectly adequate one at the far end of the NEMS floor.' Brown would later reveal that Ellis was, on the contrary, 'very peeved' about losing his office.

Ellis made no bones about the fact he was against the merger, but, having no shares in the company, he had no power to change Epstein's mind. That didn't stop him railing against Stigwood, putting it about that EMI's Sir Joseph Lockwood was appalled by the merger. According to Ellis, Lockwood claimed that 'Stigwood had let EMI Records down over a loan made to him shortly before his bankruptcy'. Peter Brown in 1983 went further, stating that Stigwood took a £10,000 loan from EMI at that time.

He seems to have confused this 'loan' with the Lockwood buyout offer for RSA, the offer Stigwood turned down.

Also according to Brown, Epstein received a call from the Grade Organisation, the large British talent agency founded decades before by Lew Grade and his brother Leslie. The Grade man complained that Epstein was going into business with 'an undischarged bankrupt, and an Australian to boot'. Stigwood was aware that Ellis was trying to white-ant him, but it seems he never knew about Brown's animosity, for he entrusted a high-flying job in the US to Brown several years after this.

As it happened, the opposition of Epstein's subordinates and of Stigwood's enemies in the industry flew in the face of the Australian's successes leading up to Christmas. Through the last three months of 1966, his Reaction label increased output. In October, Cream's 'Wrapping Paper' hit the shops, and sold and sold. A Reaction single the same month from Lloyd Banks, a makeover of the classic 'We'll Meet Again' and a cover of the Grass Roots' 'Look Out Girl', failed to chart. In November, the Who's EP 'Ready Steady Who' stormed up the charts.

Reaction's December releases began with a single from the Maze, who changed their name from the Shindigs for their lone, poor-selling Reaction release, 'Hello Stranger'. But then came the heavy hitters: the Who album *A Quick One*, following just days after their single 'Happy Jack', plus Cream's single 'I Feel Free'/'NSU' and, on its heels, their debut album, *Fresh Cream*. Both the Who and Cream releases became worldwide hits. In baseball parlance it was two strike outs and six home runs. On balance, Stigwood seemed to have regained the Midas touch, and was just the Epstein successor NEMS needed.

Personality clashes so often get in the way of what's good for business. This was certainly the case as far as Geoffrey Ellis was concerned. Just before Christmas, Stigwood and Shaw came into NEMS and Epstein called his staff together to tell them about the impending merger. Ellis, standing beside his boss for the announcement, and seeing Stigwood, his hair straggling down over his collar and wearing a grey suit with a large check design, whispered to Epstein, commenting on the Australian's 'unprepossessing' appearance. It was true that, throughout his life, no matter how much he spent on his clothes, Stigwood could rarely escape looking sartorially ruffled.

The always immaculate Epstein came to the defence of his friend, with his response to Ellis revealing he knew a great deal about Stigwood. ‘Well, he’s nervous too, and he bought that suit specially.’

While the merger would only become official on 13 January, Stigwood, Shaw and the RSO team moved into NEMS with Epstein’s people the day following the internal announcement, bringing their own office furniture with them. Officially, Stigwood was now a director and general manager of NEMS, with David Shaw also joining the board. Epstein remained both chairman and managing director, but from now on would rarely come into the office. Day to day, Stigwood was steering the ship, even if some of the senior members of the original crew were verging on mutiny.

Stigwood had learned a number of lessons with the fall of RSA. One was to always have a plan B. Despite the fact that he was now running NEMS, Stigwood didn’t close down RSO Ltd. He would keep that entity afloat, like a lifeboat, in case he encountered stormy seas ahead.

10.

Three Brothers with the Voices of Angels

‘Robert’s faith in us was the equal to having a hit record.’

Barry Gibb

ON THE LAST day of 1966, fate delivered Stigwood the greatest opportunity of his life. On this, one of the rare occasions that Brian Epstein now put in an appearance in the office, Joanna Newfield, his secretary since NEMS had relocated to London in 1965, placed a pile of incoming mail before her boss. In that mail was a package addressed simply to NEMS, not to anyone in particular. It was postmarked Sydney, Australia.

The accompanying typed, two-page letter of 25 November, on the letterhead of the St Clair Recording Studio in Hurstville, Sydney, but also including a private address in Maroubra, promoted a young band of brothers who’d had some success in Australia and were sailing to England aboard the liner *Fairsky* intent on becoming stars there. The letter was signed by a Hugh L. Gibb, who failed to mention that he was the father of the three brothers, but did mention that he was writing on the recommendation of Sydney promoter Harry M. Miller. Epstein scribbled on the letter: ‘Ref. R. Stigwood.’ The letter, together with the package’s other contents, an LP and a demo acetate containing a total of twenty tracks, was passed onto Stigwood.

With no time to listen to the material in the office, Stigwood took the LP home with him in January, put it aside, and forgot all about the three brothers from Australia, who called themselves the Bee Gees.

Early in the new year, the Who sold their old Bentley and bought a brand new one. If the boys he had helped make rich could buy a Bentley, Stigwood could go one better. He took delight in informing friend Simon

Napier-Bell he had ordered a new car as his NEMS company vehicle, a Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud 3 convertible. Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra had the same model. The white Roller, with a blue canvas roof, would be driven by a handsome young man with hair down to his shoulders, wearing, in winter, a fur coat.

With Epstein almost never coming into the office anymore, Stigwood would park his Rolls in Epstein's car spot, to the annoyance of Geoffrey Ellis. Parking in London being at a premium, Stigwood's offsider David Shaw took to leaving his white Shelby Cobra coupe on the double yellow lines in the street below NEMS' offices. Shaw collected hundreds of parking tickets, telling an appalled Ellis it was worth it for the convenience.

Late that January, Stigwood released yet another Oscar single on Reaction, now a NEMS label. 'Over the Wall We Go', Reaction's twelfth single, was a comic number written and produced by up-and-coming singer/songwriter David Bowie, who used the song to lampoon the British authorities for allowing a spate of prison breaks across the UK the previous year. The record-buying public didn't get the joke. Despite earning Oscar appearances on TV shows including *The Ken Dodd Show*, the number failed to make an impression on the charts.

Once again, Stigwood refused to give up on his chosen one. He would keep Oscar in a holding pattern, later in the year sending him to the Knokke Song Contest, in Belgium. Paul/Oscar was a member of a British team that included other NEMS acts Gerry Marsden of Gerry and the Pacemakers and Roger Whittaker. Brian Epstein would turn up to watch as, lo and behold, Oscar and the British team won.

On the evening of Sunday 5 February, Beatle Paul McCartney, at a loose end, knocked on the door to Stigwood's duplex. Ever since the RSO-NEMS merger came together, Stigwood had gone out of his way to be on good terms with the Beatles. The twenty-five-year-old McCartney, for his part, knew that Stigwood was a genial companion. Both enjoyed nights out at the Scotch of St James and extended sessions at London's gaming tables.

Stigwood beamed when he opened the door to find McCartney on his doorstep, and invited him in, as, in the background, a record played. Knowing from Hugh Gibb's letter that the three brothers from Australia were landing at Southampton the following day, he was finally listening to

the LP that Epstein had passed on to him. He'd immediately been captivated by the boys' harmonies on the first track he played, 'Jingle Jangle'. To him, the Gibb brothers had the voices of angels.

'What do you think of this record?' he asked McCartney. Glasses in hand, the pair sat and listened to the boys from Down Under.

'I like them,' said McCartney enthusiastically. He would in fact become a fan of the brothers' work.

'Oh, great,' said a pleased Stigwood, 'cause I'm thinking of signing them.'

So it was that, with the endorsement of Paul McCartney, Stigwood set out to sign the Bee Gees. The only problem was that Hugh Gibb had failed to give a London contact address for his sons. For a week after McCartney's visit, Stigwood strove in vain to track them down. Then, on the morning of Monday 13 February, he received a call from Roland Rennie at Polydor, who wanted to talk about the Bee Gees.

The Gibb brothers' record company in Australia, Festival, had sent their latest Australian single 'Spicks and Specks' to Rennie to evaluate for the British market. As luck would have it, 'Spicks and Specks' had become a hit in Australia while the brothers were at sea. Rennie acquired the UK rights to the single and was planning to release it on Polydor, as he told twenty-year-old Barry Gibb and his father when they paid him a visit that same Monday morning. Sixteen-year-old twins Robin and Maurice (known as Mo in the family) were waiting with their mother at a rented semi-detached house at Hendon, north London. The Gibbs had moved in the previous Friday, after the brothers' Australian friend, drummer Colin Petersen, who was already living in London, had found the house for them.

Rennie also told Barry that the group would have to tour throughout the UK to promote 'Spicks and Specks' once he released it, and to organise and prepare for that they would need good management. Barry and his father subsequently went around London's agents, receiving brush-off after brush-off.

At the Grade Organisation, they were seen by Eddie Jarrett, who managed the Seekers, another Australian group. This folk-rock quartet with exquisite harmonies based around lead vocalist Judith Durham had found big success in Britain since their arrival from Australia three years earlier. The Seekers had racked up hit after hit in the UK, most written by Dusty

Springfield's brother Tom, although the group was less successful in the US, where they had a single major hit, 'Georgie Girl'.

The Australian connection got the Gibbs in Jarrett's door, but the agent was not encouraging. Jarrett gave the Gibbs no chance of getting on the touring circuit with the big names. The best he could offer was a few bookings at small-time clubs. Meanwhile, Rennie had decided to give Stigwood a call to recommend that the Aussie look the Bee Gees over. There were questions in Rennie's mind about whether the teenagers were yet ready for the rigours of lengthy tours around Britain, and Stigwood, Rennie reckoned, was the man to 'break them in'. But was Stigwood interested?

'Yes, I know something about this,' Stigwood casually told Rennie, without letting on that he had been trying for a week to locate the group.

From Rennie, Stigwood acquired the Hendon telephone number that Barry Gibb had left with him. Stigwood rang the number several times that day, with the Gibb boys' mother Barbara taking the call each time. When Barry and Hugh finally trooped in, disconsolate after receiving their less than encouraging reception from agents, Barbara, unaware of how close she came to the Stigwood family's original name of Stickwood, told them, 'A Mr Stickweed called.'

The next morning, at 10.30, Stigwood telephoned again. This time, Hugh took the call. The Gibbs had never heard of Stigwood, but when he introduced himself as Brian Epstein's partner, Hugh immediately accepted an invitation to bring the boys into NEMS the next day at 4.00 pm for a chat. When that Tuesday afternoon came, twenty-year-old NEMS receptionist Molly Hullis looked up from her desk to find four bedraggled Gibbs before her. The boys were dressed as if they'd just stepped out of the 1950s, and seemed painfully shy.

Stigwood warmly welcomed them into his office, and the brothers relaxed in his company. As playful as puppies, they were soon larking about and making him laugh. Stigwood was immediately struck by the good looks of elder brother Barry, and felt the fact the boys wrote their own material a huge bonus, for them and for him. With their wit and way with words, he could even imagine all three writing and starring in their own movies.

The brothers told Stigwood that they had been born on the Isle of Man, then moved to Manchester, before the family migrated to Australia in 1958 and settled in Brisbane, later moving to Sydney in pursuit of a musical

career. Appearing on Australia's top TV music and variety shows, they had racked up a dozen singles and a best-of album, without achieving a major hit prior to 'Spicks and Specks'. Now, aching to see if they could achieve success on the grander stage of the land of their birth, Hugh and Barbara had brought them back to England to give it their best shot.

The family had arrived with just £200 in their pockets. They'd left behind married twenty-two-year-old daughter Lesley, granddaughter Bernice, and Barry's wife, Maureen; the couple had wed the previous August, just five months before the Gibb boys sailed for England. Youngest Gibb brother, nine-year-old Andy, had come with them, as had the Bee Gees' Australian record producer, Ossie Byrne, who the boys hoped could become involved when they began recording in the UK.

Like Rennie, Stigwood needed convincing the young brothers could perform live, so he set up an audition. NEMS had a lease on the Saville Theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue in the West End's theatreland, staging rock concerts there featuring their own acts and overseas performers, including America's Four Tops and Australia's Easybeats. The Saville, which was losing money for the company, made a handy audition venue. Stigwood booked the theatre's basement for a daytime Bee Gees audition in front of an audience of one: him.

On Friday 24 February, the excited trio turned up at the Saville Theatre, bringing along Colin Petersen to play drums. Back in Australia, Petersen had played with Steve and the Board and drummed in several of the Bee Gees' Sydney recording sessions. As a quartet, the group set up in the theatre basement and waited for Stigwood to arrive. Severely hungover from the night before, he was carried in by his driver and his assistant Howard 'Howie' Conder. Seventeen-year-old former drummer with the Barron Knights, Conder was being groomed by Stigwood as his understudy. He and the chauffeur gently eased their boss into a seat, where Stigwood sat with his arms hanging limply at his side.

'Carry on,' said Stigwood weakly to the Gibb boys, before putting his head in his hands.

The Bee Gees proceeded to perform a nightclub act they'd worked up in Australia, despite being legally too young to enter a nightclub. It ended with Peter, Paul and Mary's 'Puff the Magic Dragon' and Maurice stagily kissing Robin on the cheek. Stigwood never raised his head throughout the entire performance, never saw a moment of their act. But he heard it. When they'd

finished, he croaked, 'Be at my office at six o'clock,' before being helped back out to his Rolls.

Duly at 6.00 pm, the nervous brothers and their father were in Stigwood's office. His old self by this time, Stigwood cheerily laid several prepared contracts before them. The boys had been thinking about dropping the Bee Gees name and becoming Rupert's World, a name they'd come up with aboard the *Fairsky*. They'd even had posters printed since arriving in London, promoting themselves as Rupert's World. So, could the contracts please be changed?

Stigwood shook his head. Roland Rennie was about to release 'Spicks and Specks' under the Bee Gees name. The first run of the single had already been pressed and distributed, and Stigwood was prepared to pay Radio Caroline a hefty fee to give the number airtime for a month. 'Spicks and Specks' had the capacity to make the Bee Gees a household name in Britain, as it was in Australia. 'If it stiffs,' said Stigwood, 'we can change the name later.'

So, they signed as the Bee Gees. As Barry Gibb was to reveal years later, they never read those contracts' fine print. They trusted Stigwood. A recording contract bound the group to Polydor. To secure this deal, Rennie was willing to pay NEMS a sizable advance against the group's earnings.

The second agreement was a management contract. Stigwood usually only gave his acts one-year contracts, with an option to renew. Epstein had given the Beatles a five-year contract in 1962, and, considering the Bee Gees the next Beatles, Stigwood gave them a five-year NEMS contract too. The last agreement covered the sale to NEMS of a controlling interest in Abigail Music, the music publishing firm the boys' father and a colleague had set up to control the rights to Bee Gees compositions. Hugh Gibb signed this contract, and co-signed all the others for his underage sons.

Brian Epstein was unimpressed when Stigwood informed him by phone that he'd signed the brothers to five-year contracts. He was even less impressed when Stigwood said he'd acquired 51 per cent of Abigail Music for £1000. Peter Brown was sitting with Epstein at the time, and overheard him bellow at Stigwood, 'Well, that's a thousand out the window,' before slamming down the phone. That £1000 investment would come to generate tens of millions of pounds in royalties.

With the formalities dealt with, Stigwood gave the boys £300 and told them to go and buy new outfits in Carnaby Street. When they returned the

next day in their new gear, Stigwood rolled his eyes. The Gibb boys had the fashion sense of hobos.

A few nights later, Stigwood took Maurice to the Speakeasy, a new club popular with members of the music industry. Stigwood, spotting John Lennon, waved him over. 'John,' he said, 'this is Maurice Gibb of the Bee Gees, a new group I just signed.'

'It's nice to meet you, John,' said Maurice, holding out his hand.

'Naturally,' Lennon came back with a smirk.

'Oh, stuff you!' the sixteen-year-old retorted, withdrawing his hand.

Lennon sauntered away, but a little later returned. Offering to buy Maurice a drink, he told him he liked his earlier comeback. Sipping his first ever scotch and Coke, Maurice spent the rest of the night sandwiched between Lennon and Keith Moon, talking about music, as an equal. It was a night he would never forget.

Within days, Stigwood held a press conference at NEMS, announcing the signing of the Bee Gees and the imminent release of 'Spicks and Specks'. He also declared the group's stage shows one of the most exciting he'd ever seen, despite the fact he hadn't actually seen it. By this time, too, Stigwood had listened to all the tracks on their Australian LP and acetate. Blown away, he realised that the Bee Gees were a fabulous source of new material for other NEMS artists.

NEMS act Billy J. Kramer, solo now that he'd separated from the Dakotas, was given several Bee Gees numbers by Stigwood. Kramer, who'd previously had hits with Lennon-McCartney numbers and the *Little Children* album, selected the Bee Gees' 'Town of Tuxley Toymaker' for his next single. Stigwood, deciding this would be a Reaction release, booked March recording time at Polydor's new in-house studio. Only opening in late February, this was located in the middle of the Polydor Stratford Place offices, on the producers' floor. It was basic, as was the old valve equipment that had been shipped over from West Germany to equip it, but it did have a state-of-the-art four-track tape recorder.

Kramer's 4 March session was for demos of 'Town of Tuxley Toymaker' and B-side 'Chinese Girl'. Stigwood produced, with the Gibb brothers all coming along, providing suggestions and backing vocals. Stigwood re-booked the studio for 7 March, when the Bee Gees themselves would start putting down tracks, all new compositions.

On the day of this first Bee Gees session, Stigwood received a visit in the office from a longhaired young roadie. Richard 'Dick' Ashby had been the Birds Birds' road manager, and had loaned the band money to buy equipment. Now that they'd split, Ashby was left unpaid and holding the gear, which filled his old blue van. He was hoping that Stigwood would buy the equipment from him. Instead, Stigwood told Ashby to be at the Polydor studio that night at 7.00.

When Ashby arrived, Stigwood introduced him to the Gibb boys as their new road manager. 'He'll be looking after you from now on.' So began a long relationship. From now on, wherever the Bee Gees went, Dick Ashby went.

Stigwood produced the Bee Gees' tracks that night, with Polydor's German studio manager Carlos Olms in the booth beside him as sound engineer. At the Gibbs' request, their own producer, forty-one-year-old Ossie Byrne, also sat in. Byrne's contemporaries didn't rate him a great producer, feeling he tended to let his artists do whatever they wanted. Nonetheless, he would be credited, with Stigwood, as co-producer of these early tracks. Stigwood, meanwhile, impressed the Gibbs with his exceptional ear; he knew what worked, and what didn't.

The boys also brought along Colin Petersen to drum on the four numbers they put down in this first session. Stigwood liked Petersen immediately. A child film star in four hit Australian movies starting with *Smiley*, Petersen had a passion for racing cars, of which Stigwood disapproved, but had an appreciation for good food and wine, for which Stigwood gave him top marks. Petersen integrated with the Gibbs so quickly and easily he would be pictured with the brothers on the record sleeve when the Bee Gees' new single went out, although at this stage he had no contract with NEMS.

As a session guitarist for the night, the Gibbs brought in another recently arrived Aussie. Vince Melouney had called Barry out of the blue that very day. Formerly with Billy Thorpe and the Aztecs, one of Australia's top bands, Melouney had done session work for the Bee Gees in Sydney. To get to London he had pawned his guitar, and, dossing in with the Easybeats, he borrowed band member Harry Vanda's Gibson for the Bee Gees session. The brothers would invite him back, and before the month was out Melouney would be a fulltime member of the band; like Petersen, without a contract.

The first track the group put down that night had neither lyrics nor title, just a catchy, lilting melody. With the instrumental parts recorded, they moved on to record three other numbers, 'Can't See Nobody', 'Red Chair, Fade Away' and 'Turn of the Century'. Just as they returned to the first song to add lyrics, the studio's power shorted, throwing everything into darkness. As Olms and Stigwood crawled around in the pitch black checking every plug and connection, the brothers retreated with a guitar to the stairwell, which was also in darkness. Someone remarked that sitting there was like being trapped down a mineshaft, and this sparked a lyrical story, based on a Welsh mining disaster that had recently been in the news. To the night's first melody, words began to flow.

After a while, Barry called to Stigwood, 'Rob, we've just knocked up something. What do you think of this?'

As Stigwood found his way to them, the boys sang: 'Have you seen my wife, Mr Jones?' As the song swelled, the three harmonising voices filled the darkness, sending a shiver down Stigwood's spine. He decided on the spot that it would be the group's next single. Initially, its title was 'Have You Seen My Wife, Mr Jones', but later it would become 'New York Mining Disaster 1941'. Engineer Olms sorted out the power problem, and the boys put down the vocals. At 4.00 am on 5 March, the session wrapped up, with a potential hit in the can.

Over 8–9 March, five more new tracks were recorded. Taking these demos to Roland Rennie, Stigwood said the boys were keen to add strings, something they'd been prevented from doing in Australia because of limited production budgets. Rennie agreed to pay for a string section, allowing Stigwood to book time at the larger IBC Studios and hire string-players and musical arranger Phil Dennys. On 13 March, without Stigwood present, the Bee Gees rerecorded the first four tracks backed by strings.

When Stigwood heard these tracks next day, he felt Dennys' orchestration too lush, overpowering the vocals. Stigwood sent the brothers back into the studio to record a third, more simplified version, which became the master for the new single. With 'Spicks and Specks' selling poorly despite paid plugging on Radio Caroline, Stigwood and Rennie agreed that 'New York Mining Disaster 1941' would be released on Polydor in April, the same month that Billy J. Kramer's single went out on Reaction.

As the Reaction label's second single for 1967, Stigwood had committed to producing numbers by West Point Supernatural, a five-piece

group with a female vocalist, for April release. The A-side, 'Only Time Will Tell', had been written by Stigwood's young understudy Howie Conder. Because Conder had done some producing with Joe Meek, and because Stigwood himself was heavily committed with the Bee Gees, Conder was sent into the studio to produce the West Point Supernatural single.

Conder enjoyed flying solo so much that, by the time the single was released, he had deserted Stigwood, setting up on his own to manage and produce groups including Rupert's People (unconnected with the Bee Gees' contemplated new name of Rupert's World), attempting to emulate his mentor's success. Just as 'Only Time Will Tell' would go nowhere, so, too, would Conder's career in artist management. In 1993, he would pop up again, founding and starring on Revelation TV, a Christian television station put to air by Sky Channel.

Stigwood was stung by Conder's departure. It would be some years before he trusted anyone enough to groom another understudy.

*

Atlantic Records' Ahmet Ertegun was in town. He'd come over from New York to see the performance of Atlantic's Stax label 'Hit the Road' tour, headlined by Otis Redding and Wilson Pickett, at the Astoria in Finsbury Park. When Ertegun visited Stigwood at NEMS, Stigwood played him the new Bee Gees' tracks.

'I've got to have them!' Ertegun exclaimed excitedly.

'Not so fast,' said Stigwood. Knowing that Ertegun was a jazz fan, he played him the first Cream tracks.

'Oh, fabulous, fabulous, Stiggy,' Ertegun remarked. 'But not very commercial.'

In later years, Ertegun would claim he immediately saw Cream's potential and agreed on the spot to release them in the US. After Ertegun's 2006 death, Stigwood would reveal this was Ertegun hype. That day in Stigwood's office, Ertegun turned them down. The road to Cream's US release still had some twists and turns to follow.

As Ertegun pressed for the US rights to the Bee Gees, Stigwood told him he would have to wait. Stigwood and Epstein were planning to shortly travel to New York, where Epstein wanted to talk to all the American record

companies about the Bee Gees. Up to this point, Epstein had used Capitol for the US release of the Beatles and other NEMS artists, and he was naturally leaning towards Capitol for the Bee Gees.

A few days later, Ertegun hosted a tour wrap party for his 'Hit the Road' artists at the Scotch of St James. Wilson Pickett's band was on stage as, with his back to them, Ertegun was at the bar, talking with Stigwood and Pickett himself. It was then that Ertegun heard a guitar riff that he would liken to the playing of B. B. King.

'Wilson,' said Ertegun to Pickett, 'your guitarist sure can play the blues.'

'Ahmet,' Pickett came back, 'my guitarist is having a drink at the bar.'

'Then, who ...?' Turning to the stage, Ertegun saw an angelic-looking, twenty-one-year-old white boy playing with closed eyes. 'My God, who is that?'

'You really think he's great?' said a grinning Stigwood. 'That's Eric Clapton, from Cream.'

Despite his admiration for Clapton, Ertegun still didn't alter his view that Cream were not commercial enough for Atlantic. He suggested that Stigwood break them into America with some live gigs. Wilson Pickett would be headlining a series of Easter shows at New York City's RKO Theater, which would also feature the Who. The 'Music in the Fifth Dimension' Easter shows were being produced and hosted by Murray 'the K' Kaufman, Manhattan's top radio DJ, and the stellar line-up would include Simon and Garfunkel, Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, and the Young Rascals.

Bypassing the show's booking agent, Stigwood called Murray the K direct and convinced him to add complete unknowns Cream to his Easter bill. 'Stigwood could talk Satan into becoming a Christian,' one of his associates would remark.

Off to New York flew Stigwood, Epstein, Cream, and none other than Barry Gibb. While Cream found themselves booked into the Gorham, a fleapit of a midtown hotel, Epstein, Stigwood and Gibb checked into the Waldorf Astoria on Park Avenue. Stigwood had brought the eldest Gibb brother along at the urging of Ahmet Ertegun. To try to win the Bee Gees, who, he reckoned, could be another Beatles, Ertegun suggested that the Gibb brothers write a song for Otis Redding, arranging for Redding to come to the Waldorf to meet Barry.

The nineteen-year-old was blown away on meeting the soul music legend, and, as he confessed to Stigwood once Redding left, Barry was totally daunted by the thought of writing a song for him. What should he write? Stigwood suggested it be a love song. Still at a loss, Barry protested that he had no idea how someone like Otis Redding would feel about love.

‘Write it for me, personally,’ said Stigwood, before leaving him to it as he went to dinner with Ertegun and Sid Bernstein, a New York promoter and manager of the Young Rascals.

At dinner, when Bernstein left the table to go to the men’s room, Ertegun observed a mean, cutting side to Stigwood’s personality he’d never seen before. Ertegun told Stigwood that Bernstein’s ‘boys’ loved Stigwood’s ‘boys’. Meaning, the Rascals loved Cream, with whom they were sharing the bill at the RKO.

Stigwood, unimpressed, snarled back, ‘I’m going to tell him that his boys are a bunch of fucking Italian shoeshine boys!’

After Ertegun begged him not to say anything of the kind, Stigwood bit his tongue, but he never said a good word about the Rascals all night. ‘Robert can be very cutting, you know,’ Ertegun would later say. ‘Just awful.’

Meanwhile, back at the Waldorf, Barry Gibb was taking Stigwood’s songwriting instructions literally. What he wrote took the form of a love letter to Stigwood, a thank you for changing his life. He called it ‘To Love Somebody’. Over the next few days, while Barry composed and Cream rehearsed, Stigwood and Brian Epstein, accompanied by Epstein’s New York lawyer Nat Weiss, met with American record company executives. Stigwood wanted his pal Ertegun to secure the Bee Gees for Atlantic, but, as expected, Epstein was leaning toward Capitol. Finally, Stigwood did a deal with Ertegun that Epstein couldn’t argue with. According to Stigwood, ‘I made him take Cream because I gave him the Bee Gees.’

Ertegun signed contracts with NEMS securing both the Bee Gees and Cream for Atlantic. But he wasn’t in love with Cream’s first tracks. He wanted something new. Stigwood, knowing that the group had a day up their sleeve between their last Murray the K show and their flight back to London, told Ertegun to book studio time for them on the Monday. When Stigwood asked the band what they might record, Clapton suggested a number he’d heard Buddy Guy and Junior Wells play, ‘Lawdy Mama’.

Baker would drum to anything, and Bruce, who'd previously come up with Cream's material, also agreed. 'Lawdy Mama' it would be.

Murray the K's Easter shows started at 10.30 am and ran five times a day. While the support acts only played five minutes each time, the headliners had longer sets. Cream, the unknowns on the bill, only played one number, 'I Feel Free', but even then Murray kept telling them to shorten it. On the Monday, Stigwood took Cream to Atlantic's recording studios at 1841 Broadway, meeting Ertegun and his brother Nesuhi. Cream set up in the legendary studio, equipped with one of the world's first Ampex eight-track tape decks, where some of the greatest names in world music recorded. Clapton was stoked. On top of all this, during his time off he'd seen new black band Earth, Wind and Fire perform, and had not only met his idol B. B. King, he'd jammed with him on stage at the Cafe Au Go Go. It was turning out that Stigwood's prediction for Cream under his management wasn't all flannel after all.

Stigwood and Ertegun co-produced the session that March Monday as the band put down 'Lawdy Mama', after which Ertegun booked more studio time for May, so Cream could come back to put down enough tracks for a B-side and their first US album.

Back in the UK, Barry, Robin and Maurice Gibb made finishing touches to Barry's Waldorf composition before going into the studio to put it down. Liking the number at once, Stigwood decreed it would be their next single. The orchestration was arranged by Bill Shepherd, Colin Petersen's London flatmate. English-born Shepherd had worked for Joe Meek during the RSA days before heading out to Australia to try his luck there. He'd produced some of the Bee Gees' early work in Sydney before returning to London, just ahead of their return to England. Stigwood knew Shepherd, and liked his work. Preferring him to Dennys, he brought him on board the Bee Gees bandwagon as orchestrator.

In New York, Ahmet Ertegun played the Bee Gees' 'To Love Somebody' to Otis Redding. Otis liked what he heard, and planned to record it. Tragically, he and his band would die in an air crash in Wisconsin later that year, before he put the number down.

Ertegun flew to London in the final days of March. Convinced that the Bee Gees would become Atlantic's new big money-maker, he wanted to be around for their live launch. Stigwood set up an initial gig for the now five member group at the Cromwellian, where they played without fee before an audience made up primarily of the music press, broadcasters and record retailers. As Stigwood and Ertegun stood in the wings, grinning like proud godfathers, their boys received a standing ovation.

Stigwood the prankster now resurfaced. When Ertegun staged a party to celebrate Atlantic's signing of the Bee Gees and Cream, a Stiggy surrogate phoned Ertegun posing as a journalist. 'So, Mr Ertegun,' said the pretend reporter, 'you're having a party to celebrate becoming a white label?'

The British public saw the Bee Gees live for the first time in Manchester, the Gibbs' boyhood hometown. Stigwood had added the group to the tail end of a NEMS tour by Fats Domino and Gerry and the Pacemakers. These three acts then came back to London to perform six straight shows at NEMS' Saville Theatre from 1 April. Fats Domino's fans, Teddy Boys, hated the Bee Gees, and pelted them with eggs. Gratefully, the band went back into the studio that month to record more tracks for an album, to be called *Ist*.

Through the remainder of 1967, singles penned by the Gibb brothers would tumble onto the market via a multitude of artists on a multitude of labels, with Stigwood personally producing many of them. They came from Gerry Marsden, Dave Berry, Adam Faith, Spanish band Los Bravos (of 'Black Is Black' fame), the Monopoly, the Family Dogg, and Esther and Abi Ofarim, an Israeli couple in whom Stigwood had great faith and who built a big following in Europe. The Ofarims' version of Barry Gibb's 'Morning of My Life' went to number 2 in Germany but failed to impress British record buyers. Several months later, the couple would score an international hit with 'Cinderella Rockefeller'. That summer, too, Stigwood produced a version of the Bee Gees' composition 'Craze Finton Kirk Royal Academy of Arts' by Australian singer Johnny Young, who spent much of 1967 in London.

Stigwood selected two Gibb compositions for NEMS acts to release on Reaction. 'Mrs Gillespie's Refrigerator' was recorded by Middlesex band Sands. Stigwood was supposed to produce the track personally, but, caught up with other things, he let the group produce themselves. Released on Reaction in October, the number would fail to make an impact, and Sands

split soon after. The other Reaction release was 'Holiday', by none other than Oscar. While the Bee Gees themselves would record the number for inclusion on *Ist*, Stigwood gave it to Paul Beuselinck for one last tilt at the rock 'n' roll windmill. Produced by Stigwood, Oscar's 'Holiday' failed to sell. It was Oscar's last hurrah.

'Robert had worked very hard to try and make me a success,' Paul/Oscar would say. Broke, with a pregnant girlfriend, Beuselinck put Oscar to bed for good, found a job with Melon Music in Bond Street as an A&R man, got married, had a baby, and buried his ambition to be a star. Luckily, his friend didn't give up on him. A year later, Stigwood would open another door for Paul, and stardom would be his, under yet another name.

11.

Save the Bee Gees!

‘I’m going to ignore him completely.’

Robert Stigwood

THROUGH APRIL–MAY 1967, UK sales of the Bee Gees’ ‘New York Mining Disaster 1941’ were sluggish. With British broadcasters reluctant to play it, Stigwood took out full-page press advertisements announcing the Bee Gees as ‘The Most Significant New Musical Talent of 1967’. Before the year was out, Stigwood would spend £50,000 of NEMS money promoting the band. Begrudgingly, radio station programmers gave the track more airtime, and the group made their first appearance on *Top of the Pops*, the BBC TV music program that had replaced the now-defunct *Ready Steady Go!* as the television showcase for leading musical acts of the day. The single ultimately fell just short of the top 10 in the UK.

In the US, because the Bee Gees’ harmonies reminded many of the Beatles, Ahmet Ertegun promoted ‘New York Mining Disaster 1941’ by sending it out to America’s disc jockeys with no artist’s name on the label, saying only that the British group’s name began with ‘B’ and ended with ‘S’. Thinking this must be a new Beatles release, American radio stations gave it maximum airplay, sending it to number 14 on *Billboard*. Ertegun was happy, and hungry for more.

At the beginning of May, Cream flew back to New York for the recording session set up back in March. This time the band was booked into a much better hotel, the Drake, and Ertegun gave them his top producers, Tom Dowd and Felix Pappalardi. Despite this, the sessions didn’t start well. The band was too loud for Dowd. And they only wanted to do one take per number. The perfectionist producers insisted on retake after retake. On the

second day, Pappalardi, who hated their original 'Lawdy Mama' track, gave the band a new arrangement, new lyrics and a new title: 'Strange Brew'. Clapton bucked against recording it until Pappalardi allowed him to insert a B. B. King-style instrumental break in the middle.

Meanwhile, Clapton's new French girlfriend, Charlotte Martin, had introduced him to an Australian friend in London, artist Martin Sharp, with whom Clapton and Charlotte would soon be sharing a house in Chelsea's Kings Road. Sharp had given Clapton a poem he'd written. It began: *You thought the leaden winter would bring you down forever ...* The poem, 'Tales of Brave Ulysses', blew Clapton, Baker and Bruce away. Putting it to music, they nominated it as their next single's B-side. Cream was cooking, and over the next week they put down all the tracks for their LP.

That album title came, unwittingly, from the band's roadie, Mick Turner. When Clapton, Baker and Bruce arrived back in England following the New York recording sessions, they still didn't have a title. Turner picked them up at the airport in the band's then car, a hulking Austin Westminster, and, as he drove them into London, Clapton was talking about buying a racing bicycle.

'Yeah,' said Turner enthusiastically, 'Disraeli gears.'

'Derailleur gears, Mick,' Clapton corrected him.

The band members fell about laughing.

Then Baker declared, 'That's got to be the album title!'

Disraeli Gears it became. The album's stunning psychedelic cover would be designed by Martin Sharp, who also collaborated with Cream on future projects. Later that month, Stigwood rushed out 'Strange Brew'/'Tales of Brave Ulysses' on Reaction. It would be a double-sided hit around the world.

Brian Epstein was ill. On the point of physical and mental collapse, he'd been referred by his general practitioner to a psychiatrist, who, in the third week of May, admitted him to the Priory, an expensive private clinic at Roehampton. Then, as now, the Priory specialised in treating patients with mental health issues and addictions. As Stigwood had become aware, Epstein was surviving on a cocktail of prescription pills: uppers to keep him going, downers to help him sleep.

The psychiatrist's plan was to wean Epstein off the pills by sending him into an extended induced sleep, during which he would be fed intravenously. Cure by coma. After almost a week, Epstein was awakened. Telephoning Peter Brown that night, he complained that he felt no better for the treatment.

NEMS' New York lawyer was in London at the time, so Stigwood took tall, bespectacled Nat Weiss with him when he went up to Roehampton the next day. Stigwood and Weiss found Epstein irritable and argumentative. Launching into a tirade, he lectured the Australian about riding his senior executives too hard, in particular Geoffrey Ellis, who had obviously been complaining about Stigwood. Standing his ground, Stigwood went on to criticise Vic Lewis, who'd been in America for weeks.

Epstein would hear no criticism of his original NEMS clan. 'Be more sensitive to them, Robert,' he scolded from his bed. 'I don't want to hear that you've slighted them again.' Interrupted by the arrival of a huge bouquet of flowers from John Lennon, Epstein burst into tears. A nurse ushered Stigwood and Weiss from the room.

Out in the corridor, Stigwood said to Weiss, 'You know we can't listen to a word he says.'

'Why not?' Jewish and gay like Epstein, Weiss was not just his man in New York. He had become his close personal friend.

'Because he's not in his right mind, that's why,' said Stigwood. 'I'm going to ignore him completely.'

On 19 May, Epstein came home to 24 Chapel Street in Belgravia, in time for a dinner that Peter Brown organised there with ten top journalists to launch the Beatles' new album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. During the day, leading photographers were given time to snap the Beatles around the house. One of these photographers was a then unknown blonde from New York, Linda Eastman, the future wife of Paul McCartney.

Epstein and Stigwood's relationship was still far from good when Gary Walker came to see Epstein at NEMS in late May. Walker had previously been a member of the now-defunct Walker Brothers, an American trio who based themselves in the UK and had their biggest hit in 1966 with 'The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore'. Walker had formed a new band, Gary Walker

and the Rain, and wanted to shed his existing manager, Maurice King, to sign with NEMS.

When Walker and fellow band member Mike Williams arrived at NEMS, they were ushered into a meeting with Epstein and Stigwood. The Australian did most of the talking. All Walker had to show was a photograph of the new group. With no demos to play, he was banking on his previous success to score a contract for his new band.

‘Well,’ said Stigwood, ‘I don’t know.’ Thanking the pair for coming in to see them, he said that he and Epstein would think about it.

Taking this as a ‘no’, Walker and Williams dejectedly got up and left.

Epstein followed them to the front door, where he surprised them by saying, ‘It doesn’t matter what Stigwood says, I’m going to sign you up anyway.’

‘Alright!’ Walker responded with glee.

Without telling Stigwood, Epstein met the group away from the office. Subsequently instructing NEMS lawyer David Jacobs to free Walker from his contract with King, Epstein booked Gary Walker and the Rain as a support act in the 25 June filming of a Beatles TV special. The following February, the band would release a lacklustre single, ‘Spooky’. After failing to achieve chart success, they would fold, as the Walker Brothers reunited for a Japanese tour.

As the end of May loomed, and with it the deadline for his NEMS buy-in, Stigwood sat down with Epstein and plastered over the cracks in their relationship. Frankly telling Epstein he would not be able to raise the necessary £500,000 by 31 May, he asked for an extension of time.

Epstein gave him three months, until the end of September, exactly a year since their initial agreement. With Stigwood’s personal finances still tight, he also asked for a £10,000 personal loan, which, as Epstein would tell Nat Weiss, he gave him.

After the Bee Gees’ ‘To Love Somebody’ was released in the UK that June, it would only reach a disappointing number 41. In the US, as was the case with ‘New York Mining Disaster 1941’, Atlantic put it out a month behind the UK, and at the beginning of July Stigwood took the Bee Gees to America for two weeks to promote ‘To Love Somebody’ and pave the way for their first album.

Ahmet Ertegun had booked Stigwood and the group into his favourite New York hotel, the Plaza, overlooking Central Park, where he was waiting in the lobby. With a wink to Stigwood, and to Barry, who had met him in March, Ertegun posed as a hotel employee. Completely fooling the others, he took charge of their bags. At the elevators, Stigwood and Ertegun burst out laughing. Only now were the other members of the Bee Gees introduced to the head of their American record company.

Robin Gibb was always anxious in elevators and aeroplanes, but this one time, chattering and laughing excitedly with his fellow Bee Gees in a Plaza elevator, they were all so high on the thrill of being in New York City, the first time for the younger Gibbs, that Robin hardly noticed. Once in their suite, the three brothers sat down side-by-side on a sofa and immediately began composing a new song.

On 4 July, to launch the Bee Gees in the US, Stigwood took the band and the American press on a cruise around New York's harbour aboard a luxury yacht he hired for the day. Once the press had disembarked, Barry, Robin and Maurice completed the number they'd begun at the Plaza. It was 'Massachusetts', a song about a homesick boy from Massachusetts in San Francisco, even though the brothers had never been to either. All three agreed this was a number they should offer to fellow Australian group the Seekers.

After they put a demo down at IBC Studios back in London in August, Stigwood would play 'Massachusetts' to Seekers manager Eddie Jarrett, who'd been so discouraging to the Gibbs just months before.

Some years later, Maurice Gibb would tell the Seekers' Judith Durham, 'We wrote "Massachusetts" for the Seekers, but your manager wanted the publishing rights as well.' Stigwood would never part with the publishing rights to a Bee Gees song, so the Seekers' 'Massachusetts' deal fell through. In 2003, the Seekers would record the song as a tribute to Maurice, after he'd recently passed away.

Seeker Keith Potger says today that back in 1967 there was also talk of the Seekers changing management and putting themselves in Stigwood's hands. This was at a time of considerable upheaval at the Grade Organisation, which then managed the Seekers. That year the Grade Organisation was partially sold, and changed its name to London Management. In the end, nothing came of the Seekers' overtures to

Stigwood. Potger gathered that Stigwood had too much on his plate to be able to devote his full attention to the Seekers.

Although the press launch on New York Harbor went well, Epstein rang Nat Weiss from London on the night of 4 July fuming about the cost of the boat hire, which he considered an extravagance. Tellingly, during the conversation with Weiss, Epstein described Stigwood as his ‘employee’, not his partner, which was how Stigwood characterised their business relationship. Weiss responded that the Australian had told him to bill the yacht hire to his personal account. Epstein raged back that Stigwood didn’t have a personal account at NEMS!

It wasn’t that Epstein didn’t like the Bee Gees or their music, but he’d bristled when told that Stigwood was declaring they would be as big as his Beatles. The poor UK sales of ‘To Love Somebody’ suggested otherwise, but time would prove Stigwood right, and Epstein wrong. ‘To Love Somebody’ went to number 17 in the US, and the song would be a staple of live Bee Gees concerts for years to come. ‘Massachusetts’, the track the Bee Gees finished writing aboard that hired yacht, would become their first number 1 in the UK when it was released in September. Late on 4 July, after the New York Harbor outing, Stigwood met with Colin Petersen and Vince Melouney and gave both five-year management contracts. They were now very much part of the Bee Gees.

As soon as they arrived back in England, Stigwood took the Bee Gees back into the studio at London’s Central Sound to start recording material for the *Horizontal* album. For these sessions through July and August, Stigwood convinced the band to cast adrift Ossie Byrne, who remained in London and set up his own recording studio.

In Byrne’s place, Stigwood quickly coached Barry Gibb to take the producing reins. ‘He possesses a perfect ear for music in regard to pitch and harmony,’ Stigwood said two years later. ‘He is the absolute perfectionist in the studio. He will never let anything go until he finds it absolutely right.’

While Petersen and Melouney were easy-going, all the Gibbs had explosive temperaments, highly-strung Robin worst of all. Stigwood rarely saw Barry lose it in the studio, except when working on complicated harmonies and someone made a noise in the background. ‘Then he’ll explode without warning,’ Stigwood said.

Days before the group finished putting down ‘Massachusetts’ on 17 August, a move by the British Government threatened to break them up. The visitors’ visas of Australians Petersen and Melouney would expire on 17 September, and Britain’s Home Office advised the pair they must leave the country by that time and apply for British work permits from outside the country. Stigwood took the impending deportation of two of the Bee Gees to the press, which made it front-page news.

‘Absolutely scandalous!’ Stigwood declared. The Bee Gees had become one of the UK’s largest foreign income earners, he said, yet the government was trying to break them up. Before long, the cunning Stigwood was telling the media that Petersen and Melouney might adopt European citizenship to solve the problem. ‘Spanish or Italian performers can obtain British work permits easily, provided they are guaranteed jobs in Britain,’ he complained, ‘but Commonwealth citizens have to wait at least 18 months.’

In solidarity with the two Australians, the Gibb brothers announced that they too would leave the country and settle offshore. The USA was first touted as their potential new home. Then it was West Germany, where the group had a large following. Stigwood told the press it would be closer for them to commute to Britain from Germany than from the US. The affair created a political storm, and a fan backlash. The Bee Gees’ teenage female fans rose up in protest. Even girls working at the Home Office put up ‘Save the Bee Gees’ posters.

As the campaign gained momentum, Stigwood excelled himself, engineering stunts that grabbed the headlines. A NEMS secretary, posing as a fan, chained herself to the Buckingham Palace railings. An elephant was led up the street to the Home Office, blocking traffic. Girls from NEMS delivered a letter of protest to Prime Minister Harold Wilson, and landed by helicopter in the garden of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The embarrassment to the government was huge, while the publicity for the Bee Gees, and Stigwood, was equally immense.

The uproar enabled Stigwood to secure a temporary extension of Petersen’s and Melouney’s visitor permits until October. Then, on 18 October, the Home Office capitulated completely, announcing that, because the band was earning money for Britain, the pair was being granted unlimited work permits, effective immediately. The Bee Gees, and Stigwood, had won.

Cream went through the motions as they played the Windsor Jazz and Blues Festival on Sunday 20 August. They'd been together a year now, yet Stigwood had only sent them around the country on patchy live tours, paying them more than they were making and subsidising the band's existence. Sales of *Fresh Cream* had been overshadowed by new albums from the Beatles, Stones and new kid on the block Jimi Hendrix, who were doing big shows like California's Monterey Pop Festival. Cream, chafing to get back to America, wanted some of that action. But how would their manager achieve that?

'Stigwood, in his wisdom, had decided that, if we were going to conquer America, then we should do it by going in the back door,' Clapton would say. Stigwood booked Cream a seven-week US tour starting in September. *Disraeli Gears* would be released in November, by which time both Stigwood and Ertegun hoped the band would have created enough good word-of-mouth for the album to succeed. As they played the Windsor gig, the trio consoled themselves with the thought that in a month's time they would be taking off for the States.

That same Sunday afternoon Cream played at Windsor, in central London Simon Napier-Bell received a phone call from Stigwood. By early 1966, Napier-Bell had become an artists' manager, taking on Diane Ferraz and Nicky Scott. Their first single, 'Me and You', which Napier-Bell produced, flopped, as did a follow-up. But the mixed race pairing gained Napier-Bell enough publicity for the Yardbirds to ask him to become their new manager. Shortly after, opportunity again knocked, and again in the person of Napier-Bell's friend Vicki Wickham, who'd introduced him to Stigwood.

Wickham's good friend Dusty Springfield was looking for someone to write English lyrics to a catchy Italian tune she'd heard at the San Remo Song Contest. After dinner one night, Napier-Bell and Wickham dashed off the words for a number they called 'You Don't Have to Say You Love Me'. This subsequently became a worldwide hit for Springfield, going to number 1 in the UK just as Napier-Bell's first Yardbirds single came out. 'Over Under Sideways Down', based on a nonsense title and chorus suggested by Napier-Bell, who produced it, also became a top 10 hit. With two big chart successes, Napier-Bell had arrived in the music business's dress circle. He

would later also manage Wham!. Meanwhile, his friend Vicki became Dusty Springfield's manager.

By the summer of '67, Napier-Bell's relationship with Stigwood had cooled. Both had new best friends, although they remained on good terms. Stigwood, who was loyal to those who were loyal to him, had told Napier-Bell much about his past, and Napier-Bell had kept what he'd learned to himself. The last time Napier-Bell had seen Stigwood had been one night at the Scotch of St James. An exasperated Stigwood had come in alone, and, slumping down beside Napier-Bell, had proceeded to reveal how he'd just taken a handsome Italian youth to dinner, only for the Romeo to consume too much rich food and champagne and vomit all over fellow diners as he staggered to the bathroom. Stigwood had followed after him, wallet open, doling out £10 notes to cover other diners' dry-cleaning bills.

Stigwood, spontaneous by nature, would contact Napier-Bell out of the blue. 'I've just seen a Greek god,' he said over the phone this Sunday morning. 'Come over for tea, and you can have a look on the way.'

Driving to Stigwood's place via Curzon Street, Napier-Bell passed a stripped-down workman operating a pneumatic drill on a corner. When Stigwood opened his door, Napier-Bell remarked that the guy on the corner didn't look much of a Greek god to him.

Stigwood shrugged. 'It wasn't really my choice anyway, it was Brian's. But come on in. We're watching the schoolboy athletics on the telly.'

He ushered Napier-Bell inside. Some time back, Stigwood had carpeted the duplex in wall-to-wall white goatskin, which, to Napier-Bell, now looked worn and grubby. In the sitting room, a slight, handsome man sat glued to the television. Stigwood introduced Napier-Bell to Brian Epstein. Stigwood had again succeeded in charming his business partner, with the result that Stiggy and Eppy were once more as thick as thieves. The Australian had just taken the Liverpudlian to Sunday lunch at a good restaurant before bringing him back to the duplex for fun and games, spending Sunday afternoon ogling strapping young men and gambling on the outcome of the athletics. Epstein, coming to his feet, shook Napier-Bell by the hand and proceeded to flirt with him.

'Sit down, Brian, and behave yourself,' Stigwood commanded goodnaturedly, and Epstein complied without demur.

Napier-Bell spent the rest of the day with the pair. After tea, they all bundled into Epstein's Bentley, to end up on the rides at Battersea Funfair.

Boys will be boys. The following day, Epstein invited Napier-Bell to dinner, and the next Wednesday they ate at Robert Carrier's Islington restaurant. Back at Epstein's Chapel Street residence for brandy in the top-floor study, Epstein invited Napier-Bell down to Kingsley Hill, his country house in Sussex, south of London, for the upcoming August bank holiday long weekend. Napier-Bell declined. He was going to Ireland for the long weekend, he said, to walk around County Mayo with Irish-born music journalist Nik Cohn.

On the Friday afternoon leading up to the long weekend, Epstein drove himself to Kingsley Hill. Joined there for dinner by subordinates Geoffrey Ellis and Peter Brown, he became moody on learning that others he'd invited for the weekend had sent apologies. Epstein proceeded to ring around a long list of friends to round up more company. Like Stigwood, who was in Monaco aboard a hired luxury yacht with the Bee Gees celebrating the end of their latest recording sessions, all Epstein's pals were away for the holiday break. Forgetting that Napier-Bell was spending the weekend in Ireland with Nik Cohn, Epstein left several messages on his answering machine, urging him to come to Kingsley Hill.

After dinner and several bottles of wine, Epstein went for a drive in his Bentley. When he didn't return, Peter Brown guessed he'd gone back to London, and phoned the Chapel Street house. There, Antonio, Epstein's Spanish butler, took the call and confirmed that their boss was indeed back home, and in bed. Brown decided to let him sleep. At 5.00 pm the following day, Saturday, Epstein rang Brown at Kingsley Hill. Having just awoken, Epstein said he was planning to drive back down to join Brown and Ellis at Kingsley Hill. When Brown tried to convince him to take the train, Epstein said he'd call later if he needed to be collected from the station. Brown never heard from Epstein again.

By noon, Sunday, Antonio and his wife, Maria, Epstein's housekeeper, became concerned after finding the master's bedroom door locked, and Epstein didn't respond to calls via the house intercom. Antonio rang Kingsley Hill, but Brown and Ellis had gone to lunch at a nearby pub, so the butler then called Joanne Newfield, Epstein's capable secretary. Joanne in turn rang NEMS office manager Alistair Taylor, who she knew had also

stayed in London for the weekend, and they agreed to meet at Chapel Street at once.

Peter Brown had returned to Kingsley Hill by the time Joanne reached him there by phone from Chapel Street. Brown advised her to summon his own doctor, who lived just two blocks from the Epstein house, and to break down the bedroom door. Once the door was opened, Epstein was found on his bed. To calm Maria the emotional housekeeper, and herself, Joanne kept saying he was only asleep. Far from it: Epstein was stone cold dead. The coroner would rule accidental death as a result of an overdose of prescription drugs. Some of those close to Epstein became convinced that, lonely and in the depths of depression, he'd deliberately taken his own life.

In Monaco, Stigwood had sent an assistant ashore from the rented yacht to use a call box to collect messages from his London answering machine. Stigwood, the Bee Gees and sundry girlfriends were sitting on the yacht's stern deck having lunch when the assistant came running back along the dock, yelling that Brian was dead. Later that afternoon, David Shaw arrived to join the party, and Stigwood gave him the news. Both took a flight back to London the next day. A *Daily Express* photographer snapped the pair as they passed through the airport terminal that Monday, looking grim.

Stigwood would never speak of his feelings at the death of Epstein. Epstein's departure created an enormous hole in his life. And an enormous opportunity.

12.

The King Is Dead, Long Live the King

‘Just suppose where Stigwood might have taken NEMS.’

Clive Epstein

CLIVE EPSTEIN, BRIAN'S younger brother, hurried down to London from Liverpool to have Brian's body shipped back home for his Jewish funeral, and to take charge of Brian's affairs. Clive was eighteen months younger than Brian. They looked alike, although Brian was the handsome one. Clive's nose was more prominent, his chin weaker. And Clive wasn't gay; his third wedding anniversary was just days away.

The younger Epstein was very different from Brian in another way. In the five years since NEMS had gone into artist management, which Brian had told their parents back in 1962 would be just a part-time sideline, Clive had been perfectly happy in Liverpool running the family stores. He had little interest in or involvement with NEMS' artist management, yet he was thrust into the chasm left by Brian's death. He and his mother, Malka 'Queenie' Epstein, both had minority shareholdings in the company and would inherit Brian's NEMS shares, giving them a 90 per cent holding, so Clive now assumed chairmanship of the company and called in lawyer Arnold Goodman to advise him.

At the same time, from the US, New York lawyer and artists manager Allen Klein flew into London. Since 1965, Klein had been managing the Rolling Stones after snaring them from Easton and Oldham, and some time back had made it clear he would be interested in buying into NEMS. Manager of the Beatles and the Stones: quite a coup if Klein could pull it off.

In London, Klein met with Clive Epstein and Geoffrey Ellis and stated his desire to buy into NEMS and take over the Beatles' management. At the same time, Stigwood informed Clive he expected it to be business as usual

at NEMS, and that his 30 September purchase of 51 per cent of the company's shares, a controlling interest, would proceed as per the written agreement and extension he'd had from Brian. At the same time, the Beatles made it crystal clear they would neither accept inexperienced Clive as their manager nor countenance anyone from the outside such as Allen Klein buying into the company, effectively buying them. NEMS executives were also badgering Clive about what he should do.

On 31 August, four days after Brian's death, the Beatles issued a public statement. They would continue to be managed by NEMS, but Clive Epstein would not be their personal manager. To thwart the circling Klein, they added, 'The Beatles would be prepared to put money into NEMS if there was any question of a takeover from an outsider. The Beatles will not withdraw their shares from NEMS. Things will go on as before.'

For the moment, the Beatles were content for Peter Brown to remain their personal manager and for Stigwood to continue running NEMS. However, some senior people within NEMS were not at all happy with the idea of Stigwood running the show. Vic Lewis indicated he was prepared to become managing director. Geoffrey Ellis also saw himself in that role. Stigwood, for his part, was claiming the chairmanship from 1 October. As a temporary solution, Clive announced the appointment of Stigwood and Ellis as the company's joint managing directors. This was like putting two fighting cocks into the ring together. Blood and feathers were about to fly.

With the Beatles' contract with NEMS running out in October, Stigwood asked for an urgent meeting attended by himself, David Shaw, Clive Epstein, Geoffrey Ellis and the Beatles. Stigwood wanted to know whether the group would renew their contract once he controlled the company, because the £500,000 financing that he and Shaw were lining up to buy into NEMS was contingent on the Beatles continuing as a NEMS act.

This meeting took place on 1 September, discreetly in Brian Epstein's former private office at Hille House in Stafford Street, away from the pressmen who now hung around Sutherland House like flies over a corpse. Prior to the meeting, Ellis, lawyer Goodman and others had lobbied Clive Epstein and the Beatles against having anything to do with Stigwood. Goodman, a future lord of the realm, had, according to Ellis, advised Clive to 'unscramble' Stigwood's buyout arrangement with Brian. At the same

time, Peter Brown was aware that Paul McCartney was preparing a palace coup of sorts. In Brown's opinion, McCartney had by that time become convinced that he personally had what it took to be the band's business genius, and was steering the others in his direction: away from NEMS.

After opening the Hille House meeting, Clive Epstein handed over to Stigwood, who addressed the Beatles both as NEMS shareholders and the company's prime asset. The Australian outlined a case for his management of NEMS and the Beatles into the future, speaking at length about the success he was having with the Bee Gees, Cream and other acts, and, after setting out what he believed he could do for the band, he also paid tribute to his friend Brian. He also emphasised his enormous respect for the work and global success of the Beatles.

'I give you my undertaking that I will carry on Brian's work to the best of my ability,' he concluded.

McCartney responded on behalf of the Beatles. Politely, he declared, 'No one could possibly replace Brian.' Heads nodded in agreement around the table. And then the Beatle said something that must have sent a flash of alarm across Clive Epstein's face, but which Stigwood took serenely. 'We intend at this time to manage ourselves, anyway.'

It was as if Stigwood was expecting this. Perhaps he was. But then, he had a plan B waiting in the wings. 'In that case,' he said, turning to Epstein, 'I will not seek to exercise my option to purchase 51 per cent of NEMS, and the former Robert Stigwood Organisation staff and myself will leave.' He requested two months in which to make the separation, during which time he and his people would perform their normal duties at NEMS.

Without hesitation, Epstein agreed. Several years later, he would express deep regret at letting Stigwood go: 'I think he had the flair and ability to make things move, but a lot of people were putting words in my ear.' Upon reflection, he acknowledged that his brother had known what was best for the business. 'One of Brian's major contributions to NEMS was bringing Stigwood in. Just suppose where Stigwood might have taken NEMS if we hadn't extinguished that option.'

The Hille House meeting wound up quickly. Cups and saucers had been set out, but no one was hanging around for hot drinks and small talk. Stigwood and Shaw were the first to leave. Geoffrey Ellis was standing by the door as the Beatles sauntered out.

‘That’ll please Geoffrey, won’t it,’ said John Lennon with a smirk as he passed.

Ellis, blinded by his dislike of Stigwood, thought this was goodwill on Lennon’s part. In reality, the perceptive Lennon, who had no axe to grind with Stigwood, quite liked the Australian and would work with him in the future. John was simply commenting on the outcome of Ellis’s manoeuvring.

Stigwood and Shaw wasted no time setting in motion the rebirth of The Robert Stigwood Organisation Limited. It was as if they were recommissioning a battleship that had been sitting in mothballs. Flying to Hamburg, they put a deal in front of the chiefs of Polydor. Previously, they had tried to interest the Germans in providing £500,000 for their purchase of 51 per cent of NEMS, on the basis that Stigwood would shift future Beatles’ records from EMI to Polydor. The uncertainty around renewal of the Beatles’ contract with NEMS had been a stumbling block to the consummation of that deal. As it turned out, the Beatles’ determination to go their own way proved to Stigwood’s advantage. Plan B would be a much better option.

The deal that Stigwood offered Polydor was simple. He would take the Bee Gees with him to RSO Mark II, along with Cream. In return, Polydor would advance RSO £500,000 against the future earnings of records by its acts. Polydor agreed, with just one proviso: Stigwood must cease using his own label, Reaction Records. All future RSO releases would be on the Polydor label, at an agreed royalty.

The end of Reaction was, to Stigwood, a small price to pay. His corporate vision now went well beyond record production. Besides, Reaction had lost the Who, with Cream its chief money-makers, when Stigwood’s friends Kit Lambert and Chris Stamp copied him by launching their own label, Track Records, that year. Their first release, in March, was Jimi Hendrix’s chart-busting *Are You Experienced*. They’d followed this in April with the Who’s ‘Pictures of Lily’. Track would continue to roll out Who releases over the next few years.

Stigwood was contractually obligated to make three more Reaction releases. The first would be Oscar’s ‘Holiday’, followed by Sands’ ‘Mrs Gillespie’s Refrigerator’. Last of all, in December, would come Reaction’s

eighteenth and final single, 'Love Makes Two People Swing' by Marian Montgomery. A thirty-three-year-old jazz singer from Natchez, Mississippi, Montgomery had been living in the UK since marrying band leader Laurie Holloway in 1965. Like Oscar and Sands, Montgomery would fail to find chart success, and Reaction would recede into music history. Not that Stigwood was shedding any tears. By the time Montgomery's single was being shipped to music stores, he had much bigger things in train.

Going back to Clive Epstein, Stigwood presented a document formalising his November departure from NEMS and spelling out terms for surrendering his shareholding option. Epstein thought it reasonable that Stigwood take former RSO clients Cream with him. Neither did he object to Stigwood taking the Bee Gees, even though they had originally signed with NEMS. In addition, Epstein would make a £25,000 separation payment, and Stigwood would be permitted to take the RSO office furniture he'd brought with him a year earlier, and his NEMS Rolls-Royce. Contradicting Geoffrey Ellis's assertion that everyone at NEMS loathed the Australian, Joanne Newfield, Brian Epstein's knowledgeable secretary, followed Stigwood out the door to become his loyal personal assistant at RSO.

The day after the Hille House meeting, Paul McCartney held a meeting with John, George and Ringo and convinced them to go forward with his pet project, *Magical Mystery Tour*, a TV movie. At McCartney's prompting, the group set up their own film company, Apple Films, and ten days later rushed into shooting *Magical Mystery Tour*, which would be aired by the BBC over Christmas.

Magical Mystery Tour, universally panned, would go down as the Beatles' first flop. But, with the die cast, in the new year the Beatles would part ways with NEMS, forming Apple Corps Limited, with their own Apple Records label and Peter Brown leaving NEMS to continue as their personal manager. Apple Corps would go from one financial disaster to another, proving that the Beatles were no businessmen, until 1969, when John, George and Ringo would invite former suitor Allen Klein to take charge, against McCartney's wishes.

NEMS would eventually disintegrate. In the short term, Clive Epstein terminated the unprofitable Saville Theatre lease, and sold his late brother's Bentley, London home and Sussex weekender, even putting a price on the coal in the basement when the Chapel Street house went on the market. Clive would die young, of a heart attack, thirteen years after Stigwood left

NEMS. His lasting regret was that he'd failed to support Stigwood's claim to be his brother's successor.

The divisive Geoffrey Ellis, who worked from the Hille House office during the months that Stigwood remained at NEMS, quit NEMS the following June with a push and a severance payment from Clive. Ellis would end up being employed by John Reid, manager of Elton John and a close friend of Stigwood.

Stigwood didn't wait until the Polydor money came through in the new year, moving quickly to take himself, and the revitalised RSO, to levels that neither of the Epstein brothers even contemplated. Personally, he took a lease on a mews house in posh Adams Row, just behind Grosvenor Square. Most of the residences in the cobblestoned street were quaint and historic. In contrast, Stigwood's new address was a jarringly modern 1960s abode, all glass and concrete, over three floors. More a bunker than a home, like the new tenant this place brashly stood out amid reminders of how things used to be. Stigwood also employed a full-time servant, Victor, as his butler-cum-valet.

As fate would have it, Tim Rice's then girlfriend Sarah Bennett-Levy lived right next door to Stigwood, in a two-bedroom Adams Row mews house that, today, you might rent for £5200 a month. Rice had yet to meet Stigwood, let alone work with him. He and friend and musical collaborator Andrew Lloyd Webber were still perfecting their musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*, which was then just twenty-two minutes long. With Sarah, Rice watched the comings and goings at Stigwood's new home. 'We spent many an hour staring out the window hoping to spot a Bee Gee.'

There was a lot of Bee Gee spotting to do. Almost as soon as Stigwood moved in, so too did Barry Gibb. Earlier, Barry's secret wife, Maureen, had been discreetly shipped over from Australia in company with Barry's sister Lesley, and her husband, Keith Evans, who briefly worked as Barry's personal assistant. Maureen and Barry had lived together in a London flat, still keeping their marriage a secret so as not to disaffect fans, until the autumn of 1967, when Barry walked out, having met pretty Linda Gray, a former Miss Edinburgh and a hostess with *Top of the Pops*. For their first date, Barry brought Linda to a party at Stigwood's Adams Row house,

where Barry was temporarily 'shacking up'. Before long, Barry and Linda moved into an expensive penthouse together.

Stigwood also found smart new digs for RSO, relocating his staff to rented offices at 67 Brook Street in posh Mayfair. A stone's throw from the Queen Mother's favourite hotel, Claridge's, the building was just along from a house where Jimi Hendrix would soon be living with his English girlfriend Kathy Etchingham. Plans were drawn up for a small in-house recording studio on an upper floor at '67', as the home of RSO would become known. There, RSO artists would put down demos in private.

Courtesy of a suggestion from Stigwood friend Frankie Howerd, an RSO expansion opportunity arose in the weeks before Christmas. Like Stigwood, Howerd went to great lengths to keep his homosexuality under wraps. Howerd had been living with former wine waiter Dennis Heymer since 1955, and, even though the law making homosexuality a crime in Britain was repealed in August 1967, was terrified of being blackmailed by someone threatening to expose him as gay. While he described Heymer as his manager, Howerd had his business affairs handled by an agency that specialised in representing stage and screen writers, Associated London Scripts, or ALS, of which Howerd was a shareholder and director. When Howerd suggested that Stigwood buy ALS, whose writers were behind some of Britain's top radio and TV shows, Stigwood moved quickly.

Whilst David Shaw was developing an ALS buyout proposal, Stigwood flew out of London on 23 December, bound for Australia. Flying with him were Barry and Robin Gibb. Maurice had stayed behind to spend Christmas with new girlfriend Lulu. A NEMS client, diminutive Scottish singer Lulu had become good friends with Stigwood, and when he learned she had a crush on Maurice, he'd taken her backstage at a Pink Floyd concert at the Saville Theatre, knowing that Maurice would be there. Maurice and Lulu had been seeing each other daily ever since. Robin, meanwhile, had been seeing NEMS receptionist Molly Hullis, but the chance to get back to Australia for Christmas, returning as a star, had been too tempting for him to stay behind.

On Christmas morning, Stigwood and the two Gibb boys landed in Sydney, then flew on to Adelaide, where they joined Stigwood's mother and stepfather for Christmas dinner. Gwen and husband David had recently taken on a newer, larger nursing home on Lower North East Road in the Adelaide suburb of Campbelltown, a little east of their previous business's

location. As Stigwood, Barry and Robin celebrated Christmas with Gwen and David in the small manager's quarters behind the nursing home, Stigwood could never have imagined that within months this place would be at the centre of a criminal case that would dramatically change his mother's and stepfather's lives.

Late on 26 December, Stigwood and the Gibbs flew back into Sydney for meetings the following day, before they departed for London. Stigwood now set up an Australian company to serve as the Down Under arm of Dratleaf Music, which controlled Cream's music publishing, to operate out of 100 Clarence Street in Sydney. Hordes of reporters hounded Stigwood and the Gibb brothers from the moment they landed in Sydney, and Stigwood held press conferences on the run. 'Their current success is only the beginning,' he said of the Bee Gees. 'Without doubt they can repeat the Beatles' story over again. Not in the same way, but just as big.'

The mention of the Beatles saw Stigwood plagued with questions about his departure from NEMS. 'Contrary to many reports,' he declared, lying diplomatically, 'there were no internal disputes after Brian Epstein's death. Our parting was amicable. Clive Epstein, the Beatles and myself remain good friends. My business interests are very wide and varied, and I didn't wish to assume too many additional duties in regard to the Beatles.'

Stigwood and the Gibb brothers' return flight to London was via Istanbul. Both Robin and Barry were, like Stigwood, white-knuckle fliers who always took to the air with trepidation, and, to steady their nerves on this trek, took full advantage of the free alcohol on offer. Twenty-seven hours into the journey and an hour out of Istanbul, both passed out. On landing, neither could be revived and were rushed to hospital, where, diagnosed with nervous exhaustion, they were ordered to rest. Only Stigwood, the one-time distance runner, had the stamina to fly halfway across the world, party for two days, then fly back again, drinking all the way, without falling in a heap. He would be exploiting that stamina to the maximum over the next few years.

13.

The Irresistible Rise of RSO

‘Robert is a marvellously inspirational man to work with.’

Beryl Vertue

IN THE LATE 1940s, when Beryl Vertue was a teenager, she was a member of a youth club in the Surrey town of Godalming. Her future husband Clem was also a member, as was Alan Simpson, a childhood friend of Clem’s. Simpson spent four years in a local hospital’s tuberculosis ward, where he met fellow TB sufferer Ray Galton. To amuse themselves during long, boring hospital days, the boys jointly wrote comedic scripts for the hospital’s in-house radio system. Once they recovered and were discharged, the pair sent some of their scripts to the BBC, hoping to become professional scriptwriters. To their astonishment, they received a telegram from the BBC. Not only was this the first telegram the boys had ever received, it was summoning them to London. So began the career of Galton and Simpson, one of Britain’s greatest radio and television comedy writing teams, who would soon be penning *Hancock’s Half Hour* for comic actor Tony Hancock.

After the duo was commissioned to write for the Beeb, they asked Beryl, who then worked as a secretary in a London shipping office, to type their handwritten scripts at night. Before long, Beryl herself was diagnosed with TB and spent a year in hospital. On her discharge, she took a job as a ‘girl Friday’ in an office near Victoria Station. To manage their collective radio and TV writing contracts, Galton and Simpson had just formed Associated London Scripts in partnership with Spike Milligan of *Goons* fame and comedic actor Eric Sykes. Simpson approached Beryl to become their secretary, but she turned him down flat. A month later, Simpson tried again, coaxing her to an interview.

Spike Milligan conducted that interview, which was unlike any job interview Beryl had ever experienced. He offered her the job, but Beryl was reluctant to take it. The fledgling company's office was above a greengrocer's shop in Shepherds Bush, and, if she accepted, Beryl would have to spend an extra hour a day travelling. So, to put the writers off, she asked for £10 a week, double her current wage. They immediately agreed and she was hired. As more writers including Frankie Howerd and Johnny Speight joined the cooperative, Beryl found herself negotiating fees with producers. She turned out to be good at that, and as the company grew, her role grew.

By late 1967, Beryl was the thirty-six-year-old managing director of ALS Management Ltd, an umbrella company representing forty shareholding writers and encompassing ALS Films, ALS Television and Associated London Theatre. It was then that David Shaw knocked on ALS's door on Stigwood's behalf. The Australian subsequently met with Beryl and the ALS directors, Galton, Simpson, Milligan, Sykes and Howerd, and placed an offer before them to buy a controlling interest in ALS, just as he'd intended doing with NEMS. Stigwood sugared the offer by revealing he planned to get into film production. By teaming up with him, ALS's writers could expand their creative horizons. As part of the deal, ALS directors would receive small RSO shareholdings, and Stigwood undertook to keep Beryl at the helm.

'We thought it was a good idea,' Galton and Simpson would say, 'because it meant we could get into producing ourselves.' Milligan and Sykes, on the other hand, were against it, preferring to retain their independence. When the Stigwood offer was put to all the company's writers, everyone bar Milligan and Sykes voted in favour of going with RSO.

The deal created Stigwood-ALS Limited, which would ultimately become RSO Management Limited, operating as a division of the Robert Stigwood Group. Stigwood was chairman, Vertue deputy chair. Stigwood wouldn't hold it against Milligan for opposing the takeover, over the coming years funnelling film and TV projects his way. The formal announcement of the creation of Stigwood-ALS would come in February. As Beryl moved into 67 Brook Street, she noted that Stigwood had fresh flowers delivered to the offices every day. He told her to furnish her office as if it were her home.

‘We spend so much time in the office,’ he said, ‘it should be comfortable.’

Vertue was quickly impressed with Stigwood’s management style. She found that he did everything calmly, even when under intense pressure. He always used the best finance people and lawyers. Above all, his staff were what Vertue described as ‘fun people’. She was also impressed with Stigwood’s approach to her. After they agreed on a particular course, he gave her a free hand. Over the next few years Vertue would produce ten RSO films and TV specials involving ALS clients, including big screen versions of *Till Death Do Us Part*, *Steptoe and Son* and Frankie Howerd’s *Up Pompeii*.

‘Robert is a marvellously inspirational person to work with,’ she would say, seven years after Stigwood’s takeover. ‘It never occurs to him that I can’t do something, and therefore it never occurs to me that I can’t.’

The public announcement of Stigwood-ALS was accompanied by a photograph taken outside 67 Brook Street. Surrounding a Rolls-Royce owned by the Bee Gees were Stigwood, Vertue, Howerd, the five Bee Gees, and Galton and Simpson. The Bee Gees were in the picture because Stigwood-ALS planned film and TV projects involving the band. One was *Cucumber Castle*, a Bee Gees musical movie for TV to be shot in August. A TV comedy special, *Frankie Howerd Meets the Bee Gees*, written by Galton and Simpson, would be filmed later in the year. *Lord Kitchener’s Little Drummer Boys*, an ambitious feature film about five youngsters caught up in South Africa’s Boer War, was due to commence shooting in Kenya in May, with the band’s experienced actor, Colin Petersen, slated to take the lead role.

In late January, Stigwood and the Bee Gees jetted off to California to promote the band’s latest single, ‘Words’. This was another number Barry Gibb had written with Stigwood in mind, this time while living with him at Adams Row. After an appearance on NBC’s *Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In*, the group did two sold-out concerts before 8000 fans at the Anaheim Convention Centre. They received a standing ovation, and a \$25,000 fee.

Cream were back in the US too. This time, Stigwood had booked them a gruelling five-month schedule across the country with just a short break from late January into early February. With *Disraeli Gears* receiving

limited airplay, Stigwood was determined to build the group's fame from the ground up, via live shows. The strategy would work. Clapton later acknowledged that Cream's eventual huge and adoring American following was built by this tour.

Yet that adoration, and playing the same material night after night, began to rub Clapton the wrong way. He felt ashamed to be in this popular band, rationalising in his twenty-two-year-old mind that honest blues couldn't possibly attract such massive audiences. At the same time, the punishing tour schedule saw the old frictions between Baker and Bruce resurface. They were now arguing, increasingly viciously, every night. Deciding he'd had enough, Clapton called Stigwood at 3.00 in the morning London time, telling him he wanted out – of the tour, and of Cream.

'I can't stand them, they're so difficult!' Clapton wailed down the line. 'I've gotta go home. I can't do this. You gotta get me out of here! My life is ruined.'

Stigwood soothed his star, then said, 'Just do one more week, Eric. One more week.'

So, Clapton did one more week. Seven days later, he again called, to make the same plea. Once again, Stigwood convinced him to keep going for another week. Then another. And so it went. What Clapton didn't realise was that Baker and Bruce were also phoning Stigwood.

'I know I've said this before about committing suicide, Robert,' a deeply depressed Jack Bruce told him, 'but tonight is really the night.'

Stigwood calmed him, and charmed him, then said, 'Just do one more week, Jack. One more week.'

Then it was Ginger Baker, raging down the line: 'I'll get them with my fucking cricket bat!'

'Just do one more week, Ginger. One more week.'

Somehow, Stigwood kept them on the road. 'They were driving themselves mad, but they were driving their manager mad too!' Stigwood later said. Cream played on and completed the tour, but in the final months none of the band members spoke to each other. By the time Cream returned to England in the summer, *Disraeli Gears* was in the top 5 in the US album charts, and 'Sunshine of Your Love' had become a hit single in America.

During this period, the Gibb brothers drunkenly knocked on Stigwood's door one morning at 3.00 a.m., expecting him to be awake, to play him several new compositions. Stigwood had been asleep. Although he could still party with the best of them, all-night drinking was now reserved for celebrations. With Polydor's money behind him and rapid expansion in front of him, Stigwood's focus was firmly on business, and a good night's sleep. It was as if the gods had spoken, telling him he'd been given two chances to rise above other mortals with RSA and NEMS, and this third chance, via the reincarnation of RSO, would be his last.

In February, he took the Bee Gees on tour to West Germany and Switzerland, where they performed with full orchestras. Then it was back to the US to do TV's *Ed Sullivan Show*. Whilst in Hamburg, Stigwood finalised two new business partnerships to handle music publishing and European tours for RSO acts, Stigwood Yaskiel International and Rudolf Slezak Musikverlag. Both were headquartered in Hamburg's Koernerstrasse, although Rudolf Slezak based himself in London to work more closely with RSO.

Before setting off on this jaunt, Stigwood had put the finishing touches to plans for the Bee Gees' first full UK tour, a twenty-six nighter commencing in London in late March and ending in Belfast in early May. To devise the best tour strategy, Stigwood did something surprising. He called in former partner Stephen Komlosy. The Australian may have been showing off, or maybe he just wanted to share. Whatever Stigwood's motive, theatre-owner Komlosy happily, and generously, joined him to discuss the best Bee Gees live performance options.

Just before the band embarked on the tour, Colin Petersen came to see Stigwood, and informed him he wanted to marry his PA Joanne Newfield. This came as a bolt from the blue for Stigwood, who had no idea the couple had been romancing for months. Not only did Joanne know why Petersen had come to see her boss, she was prepared to drop the couple's wedding plans if she had to, out of loyalty to Stigwood.

'If he'd said no,' Joanne later said, 'we couldn't have married.' She was pacing up and down in her own office as her beau sought Stigwood's permission a door away. To the pair's relief, Stigwood gave them his blessing. 'I was very happy to see my personal assistant, Joanne, whom I'm very fond of, marry Colin,' Stigwood said the following year, 'because I knew that she was in good hands.' Calling in Joanne, the Australian

congratulated the couple, and began making plans. Once they were married, he said, he would make her Dick Ashby's PA, so she could tour with Colin and the band.

Then there was the wedding to think of. 'I can visualise it all!' Stigwood excitedly exclaimed. 'Barry Gibb will be your best man ...'

As Stigwood mapped out a ceremony that would be more a Bee Gees publicity stunt than a wedding, Petersen and Joanne looked at each other. This wasn't what they had in mind at all. Humouring Stigwood, they secretly made their own plans. At the end of May, following the UK tour, all the Bee Gees would be jetting off to different locations for a break. Petersen and fellow band member Vince Melouney were going to Nassau in the Bahamas. Joanne would also book a ticket to the Caribbean. On 1 June, in Nassau, Joanne would become Mrs Petersen, with Melouney as Colin's best man. After two weeks of nonstop rain soaked the Bahamas, the newlyweds would fly to Majorca in Spain for some sun, where Joanne would contract the measles. She would recover. And Stigwood would forgive them for eloping. Just.

*

One night that March, before the Bee Gees embarked on their big UK tour, Barry Gibb was in the audience at London's Revolution Club. The band on stage, Bonar Law, featured two fine vocalists, and Barry immediately recognised one of them, Trevor Gordon Grunnill, performing under the name Trevor Gordon. In the 1950s, Gordon's family had migrated to Australia, and Gordon had gone to school with Barry. As tight as brothers, and playing music together, the pair had made a pact: the first to make it big would help the other make it in the music business. Returning to Britain, Gordon had formed Bonar Law with cousin Graham Bonnet.

The next day, Barry, intent on keeping his schoolboy pact, took Gordon and Bonnet to meet Stigwood. On Barry's recommendation, Stigwood signed them to RSO, under a new name suggested by Barry, the Marbles. Over coming months Barry, Robin and Maurice would all work on new material for a Marbles' debut single.

Unlike the Bee Gees' first brief British tour when they'd been pelted with eggs, their 1968 tour was a triumph, kicking off with a 27 March spectacular at the Royal Albert Hall. Dreamt up by Stigwood and Komlosy, this launch show involved the Bee Gees backed by sixty-seven orchestral musicians, a forty-member choir, and forty-five members of the Royal Air Force Band. Few would remember support acts the Foundations, Grapefruit and Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick & Tich.

As the Bee Gees toured, Stigwood, casting aside the efforts of previous scriptwriters including Spike Milligan, commissioned ALS client Johnny Speight to rewrite *Lord Kitchener's Little Drummer Boys*, injecting more humour. At the same time, Stigwood sent new RSO act Julie Driscoll with Brian Auger and the Trinity into the studio. Their resulting single, 'This Wheel's on Fire', would scorch to number 5 in the UK in June and become a worldwide hit, finding a second life in the 1990s and 2000s as the theme to TV's *Absolutely Fabulous*.

To coincide with the Bee Gees tour, Polydor that April released *Rare, Precious and Beautiful*, the first of three compilation albums using tracks the brothers had recorded in Australia. Stigwood was against this, declaring these old tracks didn't compare with the group's current material and only damaged their image and crowded the market, impacting potential sales of better new Bee Gees numbers. But he had no power to stop Polydor. Roland Rennie had bought the rights from Festival, and with some at Polydor saying that Stigwood was only resentful he wouldn't be making money from these albums, Rennie ignored Stigwood's 'advice'. *Volume 2* would appear in November, *Volume 3* the following February. Further disappointing Stigwood, Ahmet Ertegun took these albums for Atco in the US. Initially, Ertegun held back at Stigwood's request, but in the end he capitulated to commerciality, releasing them. 'Business is business, Stiggy,' said Ertegun.

Now, too, Stigwood spent time in New York and Los Angeles, creating a foothold in the US. In May he would announce he was partnering with Los Angeles entertainment lawyer and artists manager Robert Fitzpatrick to form Stigwood-Fitzpatrick Inc and Casserole Music, both working out of 9000 Sunset Boulevard. Casserole would control American music publishing for all RSO artists and be an independent music producer. A New York office was expected to open in July. In the UK, Stigwood also created Marmalade Music to manage Julie Driscoll and Brian Auger's

material, and Saharet for the music of RSO artists apart from Driscoll, Auger, Cream and the Bee Gees.

Stigwood-Fitzpatrick announced it would build a roster of US artists under its management and organise US tours of RSO's UK acts, with Fitzpatrick bringing in the Buckingham as the partnership's first American act. Stigwood-Fitzpatrick's telegraphic address was Stig-Pat, and before long Ertegun was playfully calling Stigwood 'Stiggy-Poo'. In October, Stigwood would buy Fitzpatrick out of Casserole Music. In return, Fitzpatrick took control of the management business, retaining its American artists and continuing to organise US tours for RSO acts. The tentacles of Stigwood's empire had spread quickly. Less than a year since his departure from NEMS, he had representation in London, Los Angeles, New York, Hamburg and Sydney.

While in LA on one visit, Stigwood received a call from Ertegun, who said he'd organised a black-tie dinner for him downtown, and would send a limousine. The limo duly collected Stigwood, who was decked out in a tuxedo. When he stepped from the car, he found he was in a parking lot, with derelicts paid by Ertegun swarming around him. Stiggy-Poo had been pranked, big time.

14.

Hair, There and Everywhere

‘Stigwood did a very nervy and stylish thing.’

Producer Michael White

WHILE STIGWOOD WAS in New York in April 1968, Ahmet and Mica Ertegun took him to see *Hair*. The world’s first rock opera, *Hair* opened at Broadway’s Biltmore Theatre on 27 April 1968. Two out-of-work American actors, James Rado and Gerome Ragni, had combined with Canadian Galt MacDermot, who wrote the show’s stirring music, to create this hippie happening. After several short, successful runs off Broadway in 1967–68, the show’s producers had brought in director Tom O’Horgan, a founder of the La Mama Experimental Theater Club, to spice it up for Broadway.

Forty-year-old O’Horgan would be described by *Life* magazine three years after this as a ‘bachelor from Chicago’. Gay, theatrical and loving to shock, O’Horgan met the ‘spice it up’ brief in spades. In O’Horgan’s new version of *Hair*, one female character opened her coat to reveal that she was a he, wearing nothing but a jockstrap. And then there was O’Horgan’s cleverest innovation of all, the famous nude scene, where every cast member, male and female, shed their clothes.

O’Horgan also introduced a measure of wit, most memorably in the scene where three black female singers perform *à la* the Supremes, appearing to be wearing identical sequin dresses, only to separate to reveal they are all in the one big dress. This never failed to bring down the house. For the Broadway show, thirteen new songs were written by the creators, including the uplifting closing number, ‘Let the Sunshine in’.

O’Horgan’s production blew away musical theatre’s cobwebs, and blew away audiences. Stigwood was smitten with *Hair* even before the last curtain call. His theatrical roots surfacing, he returned to Britain determined to stage the show in London’s West End. The sooner he did, the more he

would cash in on *Hair*'s massive publicity coming out of the States. By early May, he was building the coalition necessary for such a venture. Firstly, a West End theatre. Knowing that the Saville was standing empty after NEMS terminated its lease, he contacted new lessee Harold Fielding Limited and booked the venue.

By the third week of May, David Conyers, head of ALS Theatre, was despatched by Stigwood to New York to conduct negotiations for *Hair*'s UK rights with Joe Papp and Arnold Weissberger, producers of the Broadway show. When Papp and Weissberger asked for \$25,000 up front, Stigwood swiftly agreed. In addition to securing the rights, Stigwood-ALS signed the show's full Broadway production team, including director O'Horgan, to stage the show in the West End. To handle *Hair*'s legals, Stigwood engaged leading British entertainment lawyer Oscar Beuselinck, whose other clients included David Bowie and actor John Thaw. He also happened to be the father of Paul 'Oscar' Beuselinck, although Stigwood would always say this was coincidental.

The final member of Stigwood's *Hair* team was John Nasht. A Brazilian-born US citizen, the forty-four-year-old had made a name as a TV director and producer in America in the 1940s before fleeing to Britain during the McCarthy era, an accused communist. Nasht had become a successful screen and stage producer in London, and although he had a reputation for underhand dealings, he was the only legitimate producer prepared to partner with novice Stigwood. Nasht, the vital last cog in the production team, brought his experience to the table, and, more importantly, brought his book of 'angels', investors who would put up the money to stage the show.

Just as the team came together, a huge stumbling block emerged. Under the Theatres Act of 1843, every theatre lessee in Britain had to submit the script for each new production for approval by the Lord Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household. Many new plays had seen censors in the Lord Chamberlain's office put a blue pencil through 'offensive' lines and scenes, and as recently as 1966 producers had been prosecuted under the Theatres Act for ignoring the Lord Chamberlain. When Harold Fielding Limited submitted the *Hair* script provided by Stigwood-ALS, which had been slightly amended to include British references but still contained numerous expletives and the nude scene, the Lord Chamberlain promptly rejected it outright, considering it unsuitable for public performance.

Under pressure from Fielding to commit to a lengthy booking, Stigwood had to let the Saville Theatre go; a good thing as it turned out, for the Saville, situated at the dead end of the theatre district, was an ill-starred venue. But Stigwood was not giving up. A number of people, including legendary theatre critic Kenneth Tynan, had for years been campaigning for the abolition of British theatre censorship, and a long-running parliamentary Joint Select Committee investigating the matter handed down its recommendations in early June, unanimously declaring that the Theatres Act be repealed.

Stigwood then lobbied Home Secretary Roy Jenkins to immediately implement the committee's recommendations. At the same time, he booked another theatre, the 1400-seat Shaftesbury, which became available in June. The Shaftesbury was at that time owned by EMI. They had no love for Stigwood, but this was no barrier, as the Shaftesbury's lessee was James Verner Limited, which had no qualms about taking Stigwood's money. Verner resubmitted the *Hair* script to the Lord Chamberlain's office, and Stigwood-ALS began casting calls.

That month, Paul Beuselinck rang Stigwood, speaking to him for the first time in a year. Suggesting Paul try out for *Hair*, Stigwood set up an audition. Paul was still working as an A&R man, but his ambition for stardom had never entirely died, and along to the Shaftesbury he went. The assistant stage manager buzzing around organising auditions that day was a young Cameron Mackintosh. Getting his start in modern musicals with Stigwood, Mackintosh would later produce *Les Misérables* and numerous other hit shows.

Paul not only survived the 'cattle call', he ended up being cast as Claude, a lead role played on Broadway by co-creator James Rado. Paul would also be appointed the show's artistic director, whose job included casting replacement players as the show's run progressed.

'I still don't know how much influence Robert Stigwood had for me,' said Paul thirty years later, 'but he enabled me to get through the front door.' When Paul told his father he was auditioning for the controversial musical, old Oscar suggested his boy change his name. Feeling sure his father was afraid he would embarrass him, the twenty-two-year-old duly went through a name change, yet again. Paul Beuselinck aka Paul Dean aka Oscar became Paul Nicholas. The following year, Paul and his wife would have another child, a son. Paul would name him Oscar.

Among others cast in this show were Murray Head, Elaine Paige, Tim Curry and Richard O'Brien, unknowns destined to become musical theatre stars. Stigwood put all cast members on a three-month retainer from the end of June, for *Hair*'s script had again been swiftly rejected by the Lord Chamberlain's office when Verner submitted it. Stigwood brought all guns to bear on the Lord Chamberlain, fully determined that this rejection would be the last shot fired by a doomed dreadnought.

Stigwood wasn't only doing battle with the Lord Chamberlain that June. During this difficult month he had to handle the publicity fallout from the marriage of Colin Petersen and his PA, as tens of thousands of broken-hearted teenage girls around the world bewailed the news. Then there were Stigwood's other naughty boys, Cream. Even before their US tour ended in June, Clapton, Baker and Bruce had decided to split once they landed back in Britain. Stigwood was unhappy when they told him, although hardly surprised. In some ways he was relieved. But first, he would squeeze as much out of the group as possible before the trio went their separate ways.

A new Cream double-album was already coming together. Comprising studio tracks from 1967, plus a few recorded during their tour break in January-February and a handful more taped live on the US tour, *Wheels of Fire* was due for August release. To capitalise on this, Stigwood succeeded in convincing the band to stay together for another five months and do a farewell US tour in October-November, with two final shows at London's Royal Albert Hall in November.

The summer of '68 brought Stigwood a golden opportunity. Rik and John Gunnell were RSO competitors who'd started out running the Flamingo Club in Wardour Street in London's West End. In 1966 opening Kingly Street's Bag O' Nails, a club popular with the Beatles, the Gunnells had progressed into artist management. Considered the Kray brothers of the music business, like those notorious East End gangsters the Gunnells did whatever it took to get their way. Reportedly, they'd paid off police to keep their club open late, and when client Georgie Fame wanted to change management, Rik had taken to his Jaguar with a sledgehammer. Not surprisingly, Fame had changed his mind, not his managers.

Over the August bank holiday weekend of 1967, the same weekend that Brian Epstein died, the Gunnell brothers had staged a three-day music festival at Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire, with the Bee Gees, Small Faces, Eric Burdon, Jeff Beck, Alan Price Set and Marmalade their headliners. While Marmalade was playing, sparklers thrown from the crowd set fire to the stage canopy. Soon, the entire stage was alight. The fire was extinguished, there were no serious injuries and the stage was rebuilt, but expensive equipment was destroyed and stolen during the blaze. The uninsured Gunnells were left £20,000 in debt.

The brothers' business never recovered. Struggling on for a year, they were forced to sell the Bag O' Nails. But that wasn't enough. Enter Robert Stigwood, who bought a controlling interest in the Gunnells' management agency, literally at a fire-sale price. When the acquisition was announced that July, it was officially styled a merger. Stigwood was chairman, the Gunnell brothers joint managing directors. The agency continued operating from its old Gerrard Street premises until a move to new Mayfair offices in September.

The acquisition brought a host of new artists into Stigwood's management stable, among them Georgie Fame, Rod Stewart, Fleetwood Mac, John Mayall, Long John Baldry, Alan Price, the Paper Dolls, and, ironically, P. J. Proby. Stigwood now boasted that he had five hundred staff and clients, although he quickly set about pruning the Gunnell list. Ken Baxter of the Stampede, a Gunnell band, was informed by Stigwood, 'I don't feel the Stampede fits with the company's portfolio.' The band found itself without representation, and out of work.

*

With business booming, Stigwood decided it was time to make his first-ever house purchase. But not just any house. He set his sights on an estate with impressive grounds and a grand mansion, ideally with royal connections. It had to be on London's fringes, close enough for Stigwood to be driven to 67 with a maximum one-hour commute.

He found what he was looking for in Richmond, to the west of London: eighteenth-century Asgil House, standing on the ruins of Richmond Palace. Completing the purchase, Stigwood commissioned renovations which

included a basement swimming pool, gym and sauna, all of which would need to be completed before he moved in.

Just weeks later, Ginger Baker told Stigwood about the Old Barn, an estate on the market right next to his own property in Stanmore, on London's northern outskirts. As soon as Stigwood saw the Old Barn, he fell in love with it. He promptly bought it for £86,000, and put Asgil House back on the market, never having resided there a day. The Old Barn estate comprised thirty-two acres, twenty of them covered with woodland, surrounding a 400-year-old Tudor manor house with an interesting background.

Fifty years earlier, nothing more substantial than an old barn had stood there; hence the name. The property was then purchased by Alfred Cox, a noted Worcester racehorse owner, who moved to London, bringing his house with him. Cox's Tudor mansion was relocated piece by piece to the Stanmore estate and reassembled over four years. The rebuild was so clinically clean, many visitors would subsequently describe it as 'mock-Tudor', much to Stigwood's chagrin. Finally, the house was ready for Cox and his family, and the day he moved in he threw a party for the workmen who had toiled on the meticulous rebuild. With the party in full swing, Cox suffered a massive heart attack, and died.

Stigwood's new home featured five first-floor bedrooms, all with their own bathrooms, and a small study where he hung the Bee Gees' first gold record and his two favourite childhood photos of brother Bill and himself. A massive wood-panelled great hall downstairs was immediately earmarked by Stigwood for parties. Shortly after he moved into the Old Barn, Eric Clapton would send him a Christmas present, an eight-foot-tall stuffed camel. It was intended as a prank, and Stigwood pranked back by having three live cattle delivered to Clapton's doorstep at Hurtwood Edge. But Stigwood liked Clapton's camel so much, he installed it in the great hall.

A drawing room running off the great hall was equipped with a grand piano and the best sound system money could buy. Next door, the vast dining hall featured a baronial table and drop-down cinema screen. At the property's front gate sat a gatehouse, providing extra guest accommodation, from which a long tree-lined drive, lit at night by lamp-posts, extended to the main house. Stigwood ordered an internal refurbishment of the manor house, plus an outdoor swimming pool equipped with an insulating plastic roof to enable year-round swimming. There would also be a heated dog

kennel the size of a small suburban house, as Stigwood proceeded to acquire five dogs of differing breeds. Plus, knowing the Gibb brothers were go-kart racing fanatics, he had plans drawn up for a go-kart racetrack in the grounds. He decreed that the house's interior must be ready to accept guests for the after party he planned for the West End premiere of *Hair*. As it turned out, the Old Barn was about to receive an early house guest.

It is unclear when Stigwood first learned of the mess that his mother Gwen and stepfather David Burrows had gotten themselves into back in Adelaide, but by March 1968 the affair had come to a head. When the couple took over the Campbelltown nursing home in 1967, David had sold a parcel of land to help fund the move. That land had been jointly owned by David and ex-wife Doreen, who lived now at Port Kembla in New South Wales. Unusually, that land had not been included in a property settlement at the time of the couple's divorce. The couple had a son from their former marriage, and it appears that David and Doreen had agreed to hang onto the land until the boy attained a certain age, after which they would sign it over to him.

Imagine the surprise of Doreen Burrows, then, when she came to learn in late 1967 that David had sold the land, without her knowledge or permission, for \$5500. Engaging the same Adelaide law firm that had handled Gordon Stigwood's divorce from Gwen, Doreen slapped a caveat on the property in January 1968, preventing the couple who purchased it from profiting from any on-sale.

Doreen's lawyers then began making inquiries into how the land could possibly have been sold when her name was on the title with that of David Burrows, requiring her to co-sign any change of title. Doreen was adamant that she had never signed any such document. Inspection of the change of title document of 4 April 1967 revealed a signature above the name Doreen Burrows. It had been forged. The police were called in.

David and Gwen Burrows were both arrested and charged with forgery, finding themselves facing up to fourteen years in prison – with hard labour and solitary confinement. Doreen also launched a civil action against David and Gwen, and the purchasers, to have the transfer of title declared null and void. David and Gwen were released on bail of \$500 each. They didn't have that sort of money, so it seems that Gwen rang son Robert in England and,

pleading innocence, obtained a loan for their bail. When the case was heard in the Supreme Court of South Australia in July 1968, David Burrows entered a plea of guilty to the charge of having ‘procured to be forged or assisted in forging’ Doreen Burrows’ signature. David was saying that someone else physically forged Doreen’s signature, but did so with his knowledge and assistance.

The Crown then proceeded against Stigwood’s mother, accusing Gwen of being the forger. After she entered a plea of not guilty, testimony was taken from five witnesses, then the jury retired. Three hours later, the jury returned with their verdict – Gwen had been found guilty as charged. On 17 July 1968, the judge sentenced David Burrows to twelve months imprisonment, with hard labour. He sentenced Gwen Burrows to pay a fine of \$500, or serve twelve months with hard labour if she failed to pay the fine within fourteen days. He also ordered Gwen to pay the prosecution’s costs, of a further \$500. Gwen had gotten off very lightly indeed.

Almost certainly, the judge was aware that the Burrows were the mother and stepfather of famous South Australian entrepreneur Robert Stigwood. ‘It is very regrettable,’ his honour remarked, ‘that two people of such good records as you should have got into this trouble, and I am sorry to see you in this position.’ He told David that in deciding his sentence he had taken into account ‘the very special circumstances of your case’, and admitted that he was being lenient with him.

In his remarks, too, the judge said that additional factors had influenced his leniency with Gwen. ‘First of all I have little doubt it is through your efforts that the money has been found to make sure no one is going to lose financially.’ Miraculously, a large sum had recently appeared in David Burrows’ bank account, from which David was offering to pay ex-wife Doreen \$2250 to compensate her for her share of the sold property, and also offering to cover the legal expenses in the affair. It can be reasonably assumed that this money came from Robert Stigwood, at his mother’s behest.

David Burrows would later admit to Stigwood’s brother Bill that he ‘took the rap’ for Gwen, pleading guilty to keep her out of prison. The judge remarked, ‘No one knows who was the leading spirit, who suggested to the other or persuaded the other.’ Despite Gwen’s denials, the jury certainly believed that she had forged Doreen Burrows’ signature, and quite probably felt that she put David up to selling the land in the first place. The

whole scheme was dimwitted. Even though Doreen lived interstate, sooner or later she had to learn that the property had been sold without her say-so.

Why hadn't Gwen simply asked Robert for a loan to help David and herself purchase the nursing home in early 1967? Perhaps she'd been too proud to ask, but it should be remembered that this had been at a time when Robert's personal finances were so tight he soon had to ask Brian Epstein for a personal loan of £10,000 to get him through. A year later, at the time of the forgery trial, RSO was flourishing and Stigwood was flush with funds.

As David Burrows joined a prison gang breaking rocks in July 1968, Stigwood moved quickly, paying Gwen's \$500 fine, the \$500 for prosecution costs, and the cost of Gwen and David's legal representation, then flying Gwen to England, where he installed her in the Old Barn's gatehouse as renovations to the main house continued. It appears that Stigwood also instructed lawyers to dispose of the Adelaide nursing home. Doreen Burrows, receiving the \$2250 payment from David, discontinued her civil action, allowing the sale of the land to stand. David, meanwhile, would continue to languish in prison into 1969. No amount of money could alter his conviction or sentence. Nor could it alter the fact that Robert and Bill Stigwood's mother was now a convicted forger, and would go to her grave with a criminal record. In Adelaide, when Ron Stigwood came home from school, the crazy affair was discussed in hushed tones by his parents Bill and Judith.

Another legal matter was now occupying Stigwood's attention. Opposition against repeal of the Theatres Act was widespread, going all the way to the top. The Lord Chamberlain, Lord Cobbold, was against abolishing censorship of the theatre. Prime Minister Harold Wilson was against it. Buckingham Palace was against it. On the other hand, Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, who'd been savaged by the press for his initial stance on the Bee Gees 'deportation' affair the previous year, was not game to take on Stigwood again. As Jenkins promptly placed an act for 'Abolition of Censorship of the Theatre' before parliament, Stigwood fired up his publicity machine once more, emphasising that it was time to throw off antiquated Victorian values and embrace the new age. 'We got front-page

tabloids day after day,' Stigwood would say with undiminished delight years later.

The Home Secretary had let the sunshine in, and the legislation repealing the 125-year-old Theatres Act was passed by parliament on 23 July, coming into effect on 1 September. With the Lord Chamberlain's censorship office closing on 26 September, Stigwood set down *Hair*'s opening for the following day, Friday 27 September. Seven weeks of rehearsals with director Tom O'Horgan began the first week of August. The Age of Aquarius was about to dawn in Britain. And *Hair* was the hottest ticket in London town.

'Stigwood did a very nervy and stylish thing,' established London theatrical producer Michael White later said. White had himself approached Papp and Weissberger in New York for the UK rights to *Hair* before Stigwood did, but couldn't afford the \$25,000 advance they demanded. As White knew, despite the fact the Lord Chamberlain had been deprived of his censorial powers, Britain's attorney-general could still order the vice squad to arrest *Hair*'s performers for transgressing public decency laws by appearing nude. 'It was a terrific risk,' said White. A risk gambler Stigwood was prepared to take.

During August, too, just as Stigwood was popping Dom Perignon corks to celebrate his win over the establishment, one of the Bee Gees threw a spanner in his works, popping pills. The band had spent much of June and July in the studio recording tracks for their next album, *Idea*, after which they were due to set off on a seven-week US tour to coincide with the release of their new single, 'I've Gotta Get a Message to You', and the soon-to-follow album. Stigwood sent them back into the studio in the early morning hours to redo the choruses for 'I've Gotta Get a Message to You', using three-part harmony.

Even though they were younger than him, the boys didn't have Stiggy's stamina. Few people did. In late July, Robin Gibb collapsed and was rushed to hospital. The crushing pace the band had been maintaining had seen the always highly-strung Robin taking amphetamines to keep going. The American tour's first four gigs were cancelled while he recovered. Once the tour got underway in August, Stigwood announced that Robin had suffered a 'relapse' and cancelled more bookings. Barry Gibb would later reveal that Stigwood put out the relapse story to enable him to cancel all the shows between New York and Los Angeles that hadn't attracted big bookings.

In the third week of August, while the Bee Gees toured and the advance bookings for *Hair* raced away into the future, Stigwood received a telephone call from his brother Bill in Australia. On 17 August, their stepmother Alma had passed away at Norwood in Adelaide after a battle with cancer. She was only fifty-two. Stigwood, who had barely known Alma, did not attend the funeral.

When the Bee Gees arrived back from the US tour, Barry Gibb dropped a bombshell, telling the press he was leaving the group to pursue a career as a movie actor. Stigwood was partly to blame for this, having told Barry from the outset that he should go into the movies. Barry's younger brothers had also contributed to his desire to move on. After years of letting big brother Barry be the group's 'coordinator', Robin and Maurice had found their feet, and their voices. Now considering themselves Barry's equals, they'd argued with him so much on the American tour that Barry wasn't even talking to them by the time they came home.

'He's impulsive in some of the things he says at interviews,' said Stigwood six months after this. In public, he didn't chastise Barry, but in private he snapped him back into line. To keep him happy, Stigwood told Barry he could have the lead in *Lord Kitchener's Little Drummer Boys*. Ultimately, that film would fail to go ahead, but before long Barry was telling the media he still planned on making a solo career for himself as an actor, but not before he met all his commitments to the Bee Gees, which, he said, stretched out for two years. 'He is bombarded with offers to go into films,' Stigwood told the press, 'but nothing definite's been decided. His loyalty to the group comes first.'

As the Bee Gees jetted off to Europe in September to shoot a TV spectacular for French television, *Idea* was released. Bill Shepherd was meanwhile producing two albums of Bee Gees numbers performed by the Bill Shepherd Singers and the Robert Stigwood Orchestra. That month, too, Polydor released the first single from the Marbles, featuring Barry Gibb's childhood friend Trevor Gordon. This Bee Gees composition, 'Only One Woman', produced by Barry, failed to chart in the US for Atlantic but shot to number 5 in Britain and did equally well in Australia and Europe.

On 27 September, *Hair*'s first night in the West End, Geoffrey Ellis was in the packed Shaftesbury Theatre for one of the most anticipated openings in British theatrical history. The smell of incense hung in the air as the former NEMS director, no fan of Stigwood, looked to the doors in expectation of seeing the police storm in. 'There were rumours,' he was to say, 'no doubt fostered by the producers for their publicity value, that the police might raid the theatre.' Opening night would pass without a visit from Scotland Yard.

Stigwood and his guests sat in the front row. Just metres away, Paul Nicholas sat nervously alone on the stage, cross-legged, head bowed, and wrapped in a blanket, in full view of the chattering, expectant audience as the theatre filled. Other cast members met patrons as they came in the stalls doors, dispensing flowers, peace and love. With the house lights still up, the mystical opening number began, and, singing as they came, the cast slowly made their way down the aisles to the stage.

When the moon is in the seventh house ...

Two hours later, as cast members were taking their bows, audience members spontaneously dashed onto the stage to dance and sing a reprise of 'Let the Sunshine in' with the performers. From now on, the London cast would invite the audience to join them on stage, and this became a part of the finale of every staging of *Hair* around the world.

Following this opening night triumph, the driveway up to the Old Barn's manor house in Stanmore was a hive of activity as 500 guests including the musical's cast arrived to enjoy Stigwood's after party, which would last until dawn.

While Stigwood's nightwatchman patrolled the grounds with a German shepherd, security men screened all arrivals to ensure no avid fans snuck by. Indoors, two private detectives mingled with the partygoers to prevent trouble, and damage. Stigwood's chief concern was the Queen's Beast, the house's ornate carved staircase, one of only two in existence, which had originally been made for a royal palace. 'People do get a bit boisterous at parties,' he said.

A band had been hired for the celebration. Nothing in the league of the Bee Gees or Cream. 'I only *pay* for low-price groups,' a grinning Stigwood would say about his parties. After a few champagnes, guests didn't care who the band was. With the group playing in an alcove in the dining hall, partygoers flowed between it and the great hall. In the great hall, guests pointed to the Australian coat-of-arms in stained glass windows either side

of the massive Tudor fireplace. Few would believe Stigwood when he assured them the coats-of-arms had already been there when he bought the house, installed by a previous owner, along with a rear staircase made from Australian eucalyptus.

Stigwood also told guests about his neighbour, Ginger Baker. Every now and then, Ginger would turn up with an axe and chop down a tree in the Old Barn's rambling wood, for firewood. Stigwood always turned a blind eye. Once in a while, too, Ginger would walk unannounced in through the Old Barn's big oak front door while Stigwood was entertaining guests, and, uninvited, join them, to talk until 4.00 in the morning.

The *Hair* after party was a memorable success, and, unlike Alfred Cox, Stigwood didn't drop dead in the middle of his house-warming. This event would be the forerunner of many Old Barn parties. *Hair* itself was destined to run and run, aided by a royal seal of approval. Defying her mother, nineteen-year-old Princess Anne came to see the show shortly after it opened. She would see it not once, but three times. Anne had a school friend in the cast, and on each visit the princess joined jubilant cast and audience singing and dancing on stage.

Hair's London run would extend over the next four years, outdoing the Broadway run by 248 performances. The bookings would still be healthy when the show was brought to an enforced end in July 1972 after the aging Shaftesbury Theatre's roof fell in, closing the theatre and the hit musical. By that time, Paul Nicholas was on his way to becoming a musical theatre star, and Robert Stigwood was being hailed as Britain's newest theatrical impresario.

15.

Forging Ahead with Blind Faith

‘Stigwood didn’t give us time to think.’

Eric Clapton

WHEN CREAM DID their final London shows on 25 and 26 November 1968, RSO videotaped them for the TV special *Cream’s Farewell Concert*, giving Stigwood his first credit as a television producer since *Traitor’s Gate* six years before.

Cream had meanwhile been begged by Ahmet Ertegun to do one last album. Ertegun confessed to Stigwood that through this period Cream and the Bee Gees accounted for 50 per cent of Atlantic’s album sales. Cream alone would sell fifteen million albums for Atlantic. So, Ertegun wasn’t going to let his money-makers slip through his fingers without one last grab for sales. Telling Clapton, Baker and Bruce that his partner Jerry Wexler was dying from cancer, Ertegun said that Wexler’s dying wish was to hear one last album from Cream. They bought the story and did the album, *Goodbye*. Its tracks were recorded live at the Forum in LA on 19 October and at IBC Studios back in London the same month. Once *Goodbye* was released, Ertegun told the band’s members, ‘Jerry is much better now. He isn’t dying.’ Wexler had in fact been in perfect health all along.

Within two weeks of Cream’s last gig, Clapton was jamming with the Rolling Stones on a TV special. Earlier, he’d sat in with the Beatles as they recorded *The White Album*, adding his guitar mastery to George Harrison’s ‘While My Guitar Gently Weeps’. Clapton and Harrison had become friends, jamming and dropping acid together. Clapton’s drug-taking was regular now, which was why Ginger Baker alerted him one day that the Metropolitan Police’s drugs squad was planning to raid his Chelsea address. Ginger had received a tip-off from a reliable source inside the Met.

‘I immediately called Stigwood,’ says Clapton. Even though Cream was no more, the guitarist was still under contract to RSO. When a panicking Clapton asked his manager what he should do, Stigwood told him to get out of the house immediately and head to the Old Barn, where he could stay until the trouble had blown over. Clapton did just that. He learned that the police raided the Chelsea house the first night after he took off, arresting Martin Sharp and other tenants, who had stashes of hashish. Clapton always felt guilty about never passing on a warning to them.

Ginger then let him know that the chief of the drugs squad was only prepared to let up on him if he left his jurisdiction. This prompted Clapton to start thinking for the first time about buying a house; in the country, outside London. He’d never thought about money. All he focused on was playing guitar. In *Country Life* magazine, he spotted an Italianate villa for sale in Surrey. He wanted Hurtwood Edge the moment he set foot inside it with the realtor, but, made nervous by the idea of parting with the £30,000 asking price, went away. A little later, he inspected the property a second time. Still unable to commit, he ventured to see Stigwood for advice.

Stigwood smiled when he learned of his star’s dilemma. Cash had tumbled into Clapton’s bank account from RSO, who’d also paid his living expenses while he was on tour. Clapton seemed unaware that he was on his way to becoming a millionaire, and that £30,000 would not be a stretch for him.

‘Just buy it, Eric,’ Stigwood said.

Strengthened by his manager’s confident counsel, Clapton bought Hurtwood Edge. He never regretted it. His courage matching his bank balance now, he also bought a cottage for his grandparents. Towards the end of the year, a friend would come to stay at Hurtwood Edge, and play. Steve Winwood had moved on from the Spencer Davis Group and was heading up Traffic, although, again restless, was up for something new. Winwood and Clapton would spend Christmas joyfully jamming and tripping together.

On 1 December, at the conclusion of the Bee Gees’ latest European tour, Vince Melouney left the band, having informed the others of his intention at the tour’s commencement. Melouney had felt overshadowed by the Gibb brothers. His first love was blues. And, he thought he was another Robert Stigwood. Publicly thanking Stigwood for all he’d taught him, the twenty-

three-year-old put together a new band, Ashton, Gardner and Dyke, to manage and produce. But it would all quickly unravel. After his existing contractual arrangements with RSO and Polydor scuppered a record deal he brokered with Apple, he injected £15,000 of his own money into the band, the equivalent of several suburban houses. Within months, he would be broke.

Melouney never learned the basic principle of business Stigwood-style: always use other people's money. Stigwood had used Komlosy family money to found RSA, David Shaw's money to start up RSO, Polydor's money to relaunch RSO, and John Nasht's money to get *Hair* onto the London stage, and would apply the same OPM principle to future successes. Melouney would eventually return to Australia, where success with new bands would elude him. To make him feel even worse, after Melouney separated from Ashton, Gardner and Dyke, they would have a huge international hit with 'Resurrection Shuffle'.

The Bee Gees powered on without Melouney, as, the same month he left them, their single 'I Started a Joke', with Robin on lead vocals, started its climb on the US charts to number 6. And, on 8 December, Robin married Molly Hullis, an event which grabbed media attention away from Melouney's departure.

Late that December, Stigwood, eager to show off the Old Barn to his family, flew a group of them over from Australia to spend Christmas with him. With his mother Gwen already there, living in the gatehouse, Robert's elder brother Bill flew in with wife Judith and children Ron and Joanne. Bill, still an electrician with the RAAF, never accepted anything from his little brother other than the occasional trip, even though Robert offered him the earth.

Bill's boy Ron, now fifteen and a student at Bill and Robert's *alma mater*, Adelaide's Sacred Heart College, joined other family members as Stigwood took them on a tour of the grounds, crunching through thick snow. Brand new go-karts awaited completion of the racetrack, but the new swimming pool had been finished apart from its all-weather enclosure. Thick ice covered the pool, and Stigwood encouraged Ron to walk on it. As the youth stepped out onto the ice, it began to crack under his weight, sending him scampering back to solid ground.

‘Why did you tell me to do that?’ asked the shaken youngster.

‘I just wanted to see how thick it was,’ Stigwood replied, grinning impishly.

Bill had asked Robert to invite their father, Gordon, and his two daughters from his second marriage, Claire and Heather, to join the Christmas gathering. Bill well knew that Robert and Gordon despised each other. Robert hadn’t seen his father since his youth. After Robert had gone to visit Gordon and Alma, Gordon had taken his bags and dumped them out the door. They hadn’t seen each other since. Despite this, Bill had implored Robert to let bygones be bygones, and think of the girls. Robert, knowing from Bill that their half-sisters were hurting deeply following the death of their mother the previous year, agreed to extend the olive branch, and the invitation. It must have taken considerable arm-twisting from Bill and the girls to convince Gordon to make the trip, at Robert’s expense and knowing that ex-wife Gwen was already at the Old Barn. Gordon came bringing a lady friend, a Mrs Grey.

Stigwood used the visit as a publicity opportunity. While keeping his mother secreted away, he invited a magazine photographer to snap him hosting his father and sisters for the *Australian Women’s Weekly*. That photographer shot Stigwood embroiled in an enthusiastic snow fight with his father and sisters around a top-hatted garden snowman. Both eighteen-year-old Claire and sixteen-year-old Heather were petite and slim, and looked smart in Mary Quant-style bobs and tailored winter suits with mini-skirts. Gordon, with slicked-down dark hair, black three-piece suit and black tie, looked like an undertaker. He seemed to be lobbing many more snowballs at Robert than at the girls as the camera caught the action.

Then it was indoors for a group shot in front of the great hall fireplace. Robert stood between Heather and Claire with an arm around each. To one side stood Gordon, symbolically separated from Robert by a chair. *Women’s Weekly* London correspondent Camilla Beach interviewed Stigwood for an article headlined ‘Tudor Mansion for a Quiet Millionaire’. It was all about Stigwood and his success. Still, Claire and Heather seemed to enjoy the visit, and taciturn Gordon kept most of his thoughts to himself – although he did call grandson Ron ‘Girl’ to his face.

In the new year, Ginger Baker came knocking on the door to Steve Winwood's cottage. Eric Clapton was there, smoking joints and jamming, and Baker joined in. Winwood told Clapton the three of them should form a group. Clapton's initial internal reaction was negative. There was Baker's temper, and his on-off relationship with heroin. Besides, Clapton was wary of another supergroup experience: 'The whole Stigwood machine and all the hype,' as he put it.

Because Clapton was keen to play with Winwood, he eventually came around to the idea. Baker, for his part, eagerly enlisted. Clapton then approached another friend, French-born Richard 'Ric' Grech, bass-player with Family. Grech quit Family just as it was commencing a US tour, to the disgust of the other band members. With neither a direction nor a name, the new group began jamming, and loving it.

In March, Clapton mentioned to Stigwood that this new band had come together, and that they had been jamming in Morgan Studios with Winwood's producer and manager Chris Blackwell. Stigwood quickly moved to tie up the band. With Winwood still contracted to Blackwell and Island Records, the Australian brokered a deal that brought in Blackwell as co-manager of the group, with Island leasing Winwood to Polydor.

Despite the fact that Blackwell and Stigwood despised each other, neither was going to let this opportunity slip by. As the band went back into the studio to put down demos, Clapton, purring like a contented cat, agreed to launching publicly with a massive free concert in a London park, a concept cooked up by Stigwood and Blackwell.

Clapton would claim that he came up with the new band's name, as he had for Cream. But, this time, the credit goes to his manager. As Stigwood filled out a council form applying for a licence to stage the free concert in Hyde Park, a first for London, the band was still nameless. Coming to a box on the form that required the name of the act performing the concert, he had to think fast. At this point, well aware of Clapton's dislike of the supergroup label, Stigwood could not be sure until the day of the concert that his temperamental star would actually turn up to play. 'I was operating on blind faith,' Stigwood would say. 'I applied for Blind Faith. I made the name up for the concert, and that was it.'

Council permission was duly granted and, in April, RSO and Island would jointly announce that Blind Faith, featuring Clapton, Winwood, Baker and Grech, would perform live in Hyde Park on 7 June.

For the first Bee Gees album of 1969, Stigwood dictated that it be a double LP, based on tracks the band had recorded through the second half of 1968. The group wasn't happy, feeling they had enough good material for just one album. Double albums were now in vogue, and Stigwood and Ahmet Ertegun were determined that the Bee Gees be seen to be cool. As was the rule, Stigwood got his way. The *Odessa* double album was the result.

The next Bee Gees single, would, as usual, be a track from the new LP, selected by Stigwood. Robin Gibb assumed it would be his track 'Odessa'. After Robin had laboured over the song for days in the studio, often not coming home to new wife Molly until 5.00 in the morning, Stigwood telephoned to say he felt it was one of the best pop numbers he'd ever heard. It was, however, long. Over six minutes long. In the end, Stigwood chose 'First of May' as the next single. Written and sung by Barry, it took its title from the birthday of his pet dog. The track, with its first line about when the singer was small and Christmas trees were tall, must have reminded Stigwood of miserable Christmases in a broken family, for it always affected him.

Easy-going Maurice didn't care which number became their next single. Having married Lulu in February he was blissfully happy, and blissfully unaware of what his twin was about to do to the group, and the family. When tetchy Robin heard that Stigwood was going with Barry's song over his, he exploded. He and Barry had been at each other's throats for months as his jealousy of his big brother developed into full-blown hatred. Robin had also had enough of being told what to do by Stigwood. The previous year, as the band headed off to Europe, Stigwood had instructed Robin to cut his shoulder-length hair, even telling the press that Robin would return to England with shorn locks. Defying him, Robin had returned with hair uncut.

Now, encouraged by wife Molly, nineteen-year-old Robin decided it was time to step out of Barry's shadow. Molly had already come out in public to complain that Robin had failed to receive credit for his work on the *Odessa* album. On 19 March, without a word to his brothers, parents or Stigwood, Robin announced that he had left the Bee Gees to pursue a solo career. Stigwood, stung by what he saw as a betrayal by one of his 'boys', was quick to react, instructing lawyers to sue Robin, who still had three

years left on his RSO contract, injuncting him against any activity not authorised by RSO, and seeking damages.

The press hounded Stigwood for comment on Robin's departure from the Bee Gees. Diplomatically, he stated that Robin was unwell. He was sure, he said, they would sit down and sort things out once Robin recovered. But Stigwood's attempts to talk to Robin were thwarted by wife Molly, who, taking Stigwood's calls at their Kensington home, repeatedly hung up. Molly, who also cut off her husband from his family and the media, would be blamed by many for Robin's split from the group, although that split had been a long time brewing.

To demonstrate that the show must, and would, go on without Robin, within five weeks Stigwood brought in the brothers' sister Lesley for a scheduled Bee Gees TV special being shot at the Talk of the Town. With a sweet though weak singing voice, Lesley blended in well enough as she, Barry and Maurice sang the set for the special, which left out numbers that featured Robin. Stigwood subsequently announced that RSO would release a single from Lesley, but she quickly backed away from a solo career. With two small children, she had neither the confidence nor the desire to be a star. Before long, Lesley returned to Australia with her husband and children.

Realising that Robin was intractable, and with Barry telling him that if Robin returned to the group he would quit, Stigwood gave ground. RSO granted Robin permission to release records of his own, on Polydor, with RSO handling his management via former press agent Chris Hutchins. Robin's approved first solo record would be 'Saved by the Bell'. Recorded just after the split, it would be released by Polydor in June 1969. In May, trying to preempt Robin's single, Stigwood rushed out a new Bee Gees number, 'Tomorrow, Tomorrow', by Barry, Maurice and Colin. It would only reach number 23 in Britain, and didn't make the top 40 in the US. The situation was now like a tennis match; all heads turned to Robin, to see what he could serve up.

As the Bee Gees' civil war raged, Stigwood was launching his latest supergroup. London had never seen anything like it when, come the sunny

afternoon of 7 June, 100,000 music fans rocked up to Hyde Park to see the debut performance of Blind Faith. Thousands camped out overnight to secure the best positions. Backstage, it was wall-to-wall celebrities. Mick Jagger was there, along with Marianne Faithfull, Donovan and Mick Fleetwood of Fleetwood Mac.

As the only man backstage in a suit and tie, Stigwood stood out like a sore thumb, as did the snow of dandruff coating the shoulders of his expensive dark blue jacket. Stigwood was worried. He and Chris Blackwell had spent a small fortune putting this free gig together. To make sure the band would turn up, he'd insisted they meet him well before the show in his office at 67. When they duly appeared, Clapton was unenthusiastic, Winwood and Grech nervous, and Baker edgy.

Clapton took one look in his drummer's eyes and was convinced Ginger was back on smack. His heart sank; this whole deal had the appearance of a Cream calamity. By the time he took to the stage with the others at 5.00 pm, Clapton didn't want to be there. He would admit to only going through the motions in Blind Faith's baptismal performance. Coming off stage at the end of the show shaking like a leaf, he felt the band had been weak and underpowered. Yet the atmosphere was electric, and the crowd loved what they'd seen and heard.

'Stigwood didn't give us time to think,' Clapton would say. Before the guitarist could run away, Stigwood packed Blind Faith off on a Scandinavian tour designed to polish the rough edges. That tour, in smaller venues, helped the group bond and perfect their sound. Baker seemed to Clapton to come back from the edge, and was playing as well as ever. Blind Faith was sounding good, really good, even to hypercritical Clapton.

On their return to London, the group went back into the studio to work on their original demos and put down new tracks, with Rolling Stones producer Jimmy Miller behind the glass. Blind Faith's debut self-titled album would be released in July, as the group launched into an American tour that started mid-July at New York's Madison Square Garden and ended in Honolulu in late August. The tour sold out, and American record retailers took 250,000 advance orders for the *Blind Faith* album.

For the album cover, American photographer Bob Seidemann, a friend of Clapton, came up with a startling photograph of a pre-pubescent girl, naked from the waist up, holding a futuristic silver aeroplane crafted by another Clapton crony, jeweller Micko Mulligan. When Atlantic began

delivering the album into record stores across America, this cover caused uproar. Seventy per cent of retailers sent the records back. When Ahmet Ertegun begged Stigwood for an alternative cover, he sent him a drab photo of the band sitting in Clapton's Hurtwood Edge front room. The original cover became a sought-after collector's item, while the whole controversy fuelled the *Blind Faith* LP's rocketing ascent to the top of the album charts in the US, UK and around the world.

All this success was anathema to Clapton. From the start of the US tour, he resisted embracing the band and its overnight popularity. He'd insisted that American husband and wife duo Delaney & Bonnie and their band, including backing vocalist Rita Coolidge, be one of the support acts. Stigwood duly secured them, along with Free, and, for part of the tour, Deep Purple. While Blind Faith flew from city to city, Clapton travelled with Delaney & Bonnie on their tour bus. On stage, his playing was perfunctory, and he infuriated Winwood by refusing to do backing vocals. Stigwood saw this coming, but was determined to cash in while Clapton could be corralled.

Once Blind Faith arrived back in England at the end of August, Clapton went off and played with the Plastic Ono Band at John Lennon's invitation, then toured with Delaney & Bonnie, who became Delaney & Bonnie & Friends, as Clapton and others including Billy Preston, the black American keyboardist who played with both the Beatles and the Stones, joined their ranks. Clapton never officially quit Blind Faith, he just walked away. Stigwood was left the task of sorting out the contractual complications caused by the guitarist's old and new arrangements.

Rather than keep Blind Faith going without him, the others decided to try something new. Recruiting Graham Bond and seven others, Baker, Winwood and Grech formed Ginger Baker's Air Force, producing a thunderously big sound. Under RSO management, they began playing large venues that autumn. They would record two albums in 1970.

That same month of August, as Blind Faith dissolved, Barry Gibb's protégés the Marbles also broke up. A planned second Marbles single never eventuated, and, according to Graham Bonnet, Stigwood was only interested in him, planning to turn him into a solo star like Tom Jones and sending him to Las Vegas. Bonnet wasn't interested. He and cousin Trevor went their separate ways.

In August, too, the latest Bee Gees battle played out. Robin Gibb's single 'Saved by the Bell' far outsold his brothers' 'Tomorrow, Tomorrow', becoming a worldwide hit. In the UK it was only beaten for the top spot by the Stones' 'Honky Tonk Women'. Emboldened, Robin signed up with RSO competitor NEMS, which was still struggling along, a dinosaur waiting to die, now with Vic Lewis at the helm. As a gloating Lewis invited Stigwood to sue Robin and NEMS, the Australian decided to wash his hands of the runaway. RSO freed Robin of his contract. In return, Robin agreed to sell Stigwood his share of Abigail Music and surrender his rights to Bee Gees music royalties.

Stigwood, determined to show that the Bee Gees were far from finished, on 11 August commenced production of the *Cucumber Castle* television series that had been in the works since 1967. The shoot took place in the grounds of his Old Barn estate, with Stigwood joking that the property's owner had let the producers have it for a song; a Bee Gees song. The show, intended as the pilot of a thirteen-episode series, was a *Laugh-In* set in Tudor times, starring Barry, Maurice and Colin, co-starring Frankie Howerd and with guest appearances from Spike Milligan, Vincent Price and Maurice's wife, Lulu, by this time a big star with her own hit TV variety series. Stigwood even made a cameo appearance, as did youngest Gibb brother Andy. Within a week, production was held up, going over its £50,000 budget as rain swamped Middlesex and a van containing £10,000 worth of equipment was stolen.

Midway through filming, it was announced that RSO had fired Colin Petersen, from the show and from the Bee Gees. An embarrassed Dick Ashby delivered the drummer a letter from Stigwood informing him that his contract had been terminated. Officially, this came about because Petersen was 'producing other artists and neglecting Bee Gees projects'. Privately, Petersen was convinced that Maurice had told Stigwood he'd been questioning RSO's large cut of Bee Gees' income. Petersen countered that Barry Gibb was also producing other artists. Why hadn't Stigwood fired him?

Petersen was right about that. Barry had indeed been spending time in the studio with other artists. One of his new finds was pretty black American-born Pat 'P. P.' Arnold. She knew Rod Stewart, who introduced her to Stigwood's driver Jim Morris, who introduced her to Barry. On Barry's say-so, Stigwood signed Arnold to RSO, and Barry produced her

single 'Bury Me Down the River'. After this failed to chart, in the new year Stigwood would send Arnold to work with Clapton and Delaney & Bonnie & Friends. She would subsequently establish a career in musical theatre.

Both Barry and Maurice were in the studio through that summer and autumn with another of Barry's finds, seventeen-year-old Australian girl Cheryl Gray. Stigwood, declaring she had a better voice than Barbra Streisand, signed Cheryl and changed her name to Samantha Sang. Barry and Maurice produced her version of their 'The Love of a Woman', with lush orchestral backing arranged by Bill Shepherd, but, despite solid plugging from RSO, the Sang single failed in both the UK and Australia.

The old working visa problem then raised its head. With Gray's visa running out, Stigwood consigned her to Ahmet Ertegun's care in New York and again took on the Home Office. This time, he lost. Little-known Sang was no Bee Gees, and had no star power. Cheryl/Samantha went home to Australia. Years later, in 1978, she would have a number 3 hit in the US with 'Emotion', written by Barry and Robin Gibb.

Barry had also run into two muso friends from Australia who'd come to London to try their luck. Ohio-born Steve Kipner of Steve and the Board and Melbourne's Steve Groves of the Kinetics had been working around England as Steve and Stevie. Stigwood signed them to the Gunnell agency, and changed their name, to Tin Tin. That July and August, Maurice produced their first single, 'Only Ladies Play Croquet'. Released by Polydor in August, it bombed. Tin Tin's second single, also produced by Maurice, would be released in the UK the following March. 'Toast and Marmalade for Tea' went nowhere in Britain, but, after Stigwood sent it to Ertegun, Atlantic released it in 1971 in the US, where it went to number 20.

When Colin Petersen's argument fell on deaf ears, he sued RSO, claiming an interest in the Bee Gees brand name. Petersen lost in the High Court. Finding doors closed to him in Britain after his fallout with Stigwood, he took wife Joanne back to Australia, where he struggled to make a career as a producer. Eventually quitting the music business, he would throw himself into restoring old houses.

Cucumber Castle went to air with Petersen's scenes deleted. With a poor reception to the pilot, the series wasn't picked up. Having seen this as the start of screen careers that Stigwood had promised them two years before, Barry and Maurice were bitterly disappointed by the show's failure.

Chas Chandler, six-foot-four bass player with the Animals, didn't think he was much of a musician. So, after the Animals split in 1966, he dipped his toe into management waters. In September that year he brought to London a lanky young black guitarist he'd seen in New York City, putting together a band to support him. The guitarist's name was Jimmy James. Chandler changed it to Jimi Hendrix, and called his backing band the Experience. Unable to interest major record companies in his creation, Chandler finally succeeded in getting Jimi Hendrix and the Experience signed to Lambert and Stamp's Track Records. Chandler's instincts for a winner launched Hendrix, Track and himself into pop music's stratosphere.

Even before Hendrix died in September 1970 at the age of twenty-seven, apparently as a result of a drug overdose, Chandler, disenchanted with his protégé's lifestyle, had quit as his manager and approached Stigwood, proposing they go into partnership. Stigwood liked Chandler, and, impressed by what he'd done with Hendrix, set up Montgrove Productions, Montgrove Music and Montgrove Investments with him, and gave Chandler office space at 67 Brook Street. Chandler before long recruited a noisy outfit from Wolverhampton called Slade.

Barry and Maurice Gibb had agreed to go into the studio in December to start a new Bee Gees album. Barry turned up, but Maurice didn't. Furious, Barry rang Stigwood, who informed him that Maurice had taken Lulu to Australia for Christmas. Maurice secretly blamed Barry, in part, for Robin's departure, and out of loyalty to his troubled twin he couldn't bring himself to work with their big brother again. Stigwood, trying to cover for Maurice, told Barry that his brother had gone Down Under to promote the lamentable *Cucumber Castle*.

Barry didn't buy it. 'That's it!' he told Stigwood. 'I quit!'
The Bee Gees were no more.

16.

All in the Family

‘Robert was putting us back together in his way.’

Barry Gibb

GINI SMYTHE JOINED the RSO family in 1969. For close to a year, with Stigwood frequently out of the office, she never even met the boss as she worked in the basement at 67 Brook Street as secretary to RSO publicist Robin Turner. Gini had started out working briefly for Ringmaker Music, run by Rolling Stones producer Jimmy Miller and Tony Secunda, manager of Move, Procol Harum and the Moody Blues. Gini’s husband, Colin Smythe, was then a roadie working for the Moody Blues. Gini soon moved on to Marmalade Records, working for Giorgio Gomelsky, one-time manager of the Yardbirds. When Gomelsky went broke and relocated to France, Gini went to RSO.

In the autumn of 1969, Stigwood’s then-secretary Denise announced that she was leaving RSO to have her first baby, and a search began to find someone to take Denise’s place. ‘Many applicants were screened,’ says Gini, ‘but Robert didn’t like or wouldn’t commit to anyone to sit in her chair.’ Gini’s boss, Robin Turner, was moving on. ‘So,’ says Gini, ‘it was decided that I would sit up in the executive office, answer Robert’s phones, generally pretend that I knew what I was doing, and be there until a replacement was found for Denise.’

Stigwood spent a lot of time in the United States in late 1969 and early 1970, and during this period it was always Gini he spoke to when phoning London to collect messages. ‘By the time he came back to London he had become used to my voice,’ says Gini. ‘So I stayed. And stayed. Robert didn’t really recruit me – rather he got stuck with me.’ This was January 1970. Fifteen years later, Gini would still be Stigwood’s invaluable right hand.

That January, just as Gini was settling into her new role with Stigwood, and her roadie husband Colin was touring with new employer Ginger Baker's Air Force, Maurice Gibb arrived back in London and came to see his manager. As Maurice and Stigwood talked about what the young man might do now, the Australian held up a script for a stage musical, *Sing a Rude Song*. The show, based on the life of entertainer Marie Lloyd, was being staged at the Greenwich Theatre starring much-loved comedian Barbara Windsor, who'd made her name in *Carry On* movies. Stigwood, on the lookout for more theatrical opportunities now that *Hair* was a West End staple, had invested in this new show.

'Would you like to take it home and read it?' Stigwood suggested as he passed the script over to Maurice.

Maurice took it home, and the next day Stigwood rang and talked him into taking the co-starring role of Marie Lloyd's husband, Irish jockey Bernard Dillon. With the show due to open on 18 February, Maurice went straight into rehearsals. By the time the show opened, the fact that the Bee Gees' Maurice Gibb was topping the bill with Barbara Windsor ensured it played to sold-out houses until transferring to the Garrick in the West End in May. Maurice was leaden, and critics were cruel, but the audiences kept coming. At the time, Maurice was upbeat about this new string to his artistic bow, but years later he confessed, 'I hated it.'

In the spring of 1970, Delaney & Bonnie & Friends folded, and Eric Clapton invited three American members of the band, Carl Radle, Bobby Whitlock and Jim Gordon, to come jam with him. They moved into Hurtwood Edge, and each day melted into the next as the four played and played, fuelled by a cocktail of brandy, vodka, sleeping tablets and cocaine. Clapton was in seventh heaven.

George Harrison frequently visited. During this period Clapton and the Americans played on several tracks on George's *All Things Must Pass*, a triple album pulled together by legendary American producer Phil Spector. The trusting Harrison was blissfully unaware that his friend Clapton was courting his wife, Pattie, behind his back, although Pattie was resisting. One night, after a visit to Pattie while George was away, Clapton had rolled his new Ferrari Dino in a country lane, then abandoned it. Investigating police failed to discover that he'd never possessed a driver's licence.

One Sunday night in June, Clapton, Radle, Whitlock and Gordon played a charity concert at London's Lyceum, in the Strand. Ashton, Gardner and Dyke were the opening act, and when Clapton's friend Tony Ashton learned that the group didn't have a name, he suggested they call themselves Del and the Dominos, because Ashton always called Clapton 'Del'. When Ashton subsequently introduced the new band as Derek and the Dominos, the name stuck.

A few weeks later, Clapton and George Harrison were both at one of Stigwood's Old Barn parties. There, unable to contain his guilt, Clapton blurted his secret to Harrison. 'I'm in love with your wife.'

Although, on the surface, George treated the admission as a joke, Clapton felt sure he could see hurt in his friend's eyes, and suspected he already knew. Stigwood, now also learning of the as yet unrequited love affair, decided to keep Clapton's mind occupied and convinced him to tour. Wanting none of the Cream or Blind Faith hype, Clapton only agreed on condition the tour take in small venues, with the identities of the members of Derek and the Dominos kept secret.

During this period, Clapton wrote the songs for the Derek and the Dominos album *Layla*, beginning with the single of the same name, a love song to Pattie. Flying to Miami, and joined by Allman Brothers guitarist Duane Allman, the band put the LP down at Criteria under the guiding hand of Tom Dowd. Back in the UK, the group resumed touring as the album hit the record shops. To Clapton's astonishment, the album didn't sell. Like a successful novelist who releases a book under a nom de plume expecting it to sell on its own merits, Clapton had refused to allow any promotion for *Layla*.

After Stigwood and Ertegun eventually talked him into allowing them to send 'Derek is Eric' badges out to the media, Clapton agreed that the band would actively promote the album as they toured. But it was too little, too late. Clapton was losing heart, and falling deeper and deeper into the grip of hard drugs. Then, midway through the US tour, he was knocked even further off course when Stigwood called to advise that his beloved grandfather was in hospital in Guildford with suspected cancer. After flying home to be at his grandfather's side, Clapton came away feeling helpless, and oddly guilty.

Few guests arriving at the Old Barn for Stigwood's parties in 1970 knew that the bald, middle-aged gatekeeper opening and closing the gate for them was their host's stepfather. Even fewer would have known that the man had recently served a stint behind bars for forgery. After David Burrows was released from prison in South Australia, Stigwood flew him to England, where he joined wife Gwen in the Old Barn's gatehouse. Every afternoon promptly at 4.00, Stigwood's butler opened the bar at the main house. Fresh flowers, ordered daily, adorned the bar, along with Dom Perignon on ice. Once Burrows arrived at the estate, he began to drink excessively, becoming a nasty drunk. Bitter now, he blamed Stigwood's mother for the crime that had sent him to prison. In the end, Stigwood ordered the bar locked whenever he himself wasn't around.

David was banned from Stigwood parties too, but Gwen was always there. 'She was a player, she loved partying,' says grandson Ron. 'She wanted part of the limelight, and Robert was all for that.' Often, at 11.00 pm, Robert would come up to his mother as she held court with a group of his guests, look at his watch, and, with a wink to friends, declare, 'Time for bed, Mother.'

As the guests laughed, Gwen ignored Robert, and partied on.

Glenn Wheatley arrived in England that summer. Fresh off the *Fairsky* from Australia, the bass guitarist turned manager made a beeline for Stigwood's offices. In Australia, Wheatley's band the Masters Apprentices had achieved some success, and they were ready to break into the big time in Britain. Previously, they'd been managed by Darryl Sambell, who also managed his girlfriend, singer Bev Harrell. But Sambell had skipped the country, fleeing to New Zealand with debts reportedly littering his wake. So, Wheatley had put up his hand to take on the band's management and find them a record deal in London.

His quest brought the long-haired youngster in through the glossy black double doors of 67 Brook Street and to the executive office at the rear of the first floor, where he was to keep his appointment with the chairman of RSO. When Gini Smythe showed him in to meet the boss, Wheatley found himself in a large, plushly carpeted room. A crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling. There was a fireplace to one side. Stigwood himself was

installed at the far end of the room behind a massive desk made from a sheet of 3-centimetre-thick glass resting on four large stone lions.

According to Wheatley, Stigwood directed him to a low chair across the desk while he himself sat up high, with his back to a large window so that the visitor sat looking into the light. In Wheatley's opinion, Stigwood was using 'power psychology, straight out of the textbooks'. While all newcomers would remark on Stigwood's impressive desk, Wheatley would be the only one to suggest he used this sort of 'power psychology'.

'You'll have to refresh my memory for me, dear boy,' Stigwood began.

'We're from Adelaide, Mr Stigwood,' Wheatley gushed. 'The Masters Apprentices. We used to be managed by Darryl Sambell.'

Stigwood showed nary a flicker of recognition at the mention of the name. Yet, back in Adelaide, Sambell had boasted that he'd been an 'associate' of Stigwood's. Where and when that had been, he'd never volunteered. Certainly, Sambell had spoken with some authority of Stigwood's sexual proclivities. As a consequence, other members of the Masters Apprentices had warned Wheatley before they all set off from Australia, 'Glenn, you may have to sacrifice yourself for the good of the Masters.'

Stigwood heard Wheatley out. By the time the nervous novice had delivered his manager's spiel, Stigwood seemed interested in the Adelaide band. As it turned out, any connection with Adelaide won Stigwood's attention. 'Come to dinner, Glenn,' he then said. Telling Wheatley that he lived in Stanmore, he added, 'I'll send a car for you.'

Wheatley immediately thought that Stigwood was hitting on him. He may well have caught Stigwood's eye, but a dinner invitation was Stiggy's standard *modus operandi*. His 1965 deal with Polydor had been brokered over dinner. A theatrical partnership with producer Michael White would be sealed at their first dinner. When Stephen Stills of American band Crosby, Stills and Nash came to see Stigwood on Ahmet Ertegun's recommendation, to discuss UK management of the group, Stigwood responded, 'Let's have dinner.'

Stills had gone to dinner. But Wheatley balked. 'There was no innuendo in the invitation,' he would admit, 'but I thought better of putting myself in a compromising situation.' So Wheatley declined the invitation and walked away from RSO. He subsequently secured the Masters Apprentices a UK record deal with EMI, but after the band recorded an album's worth of

material, instead of sticking around to find good management and tour Britain promoting it – a must, as the Bee Gees had learned when they too were fresh off the boat – Wheatley and the band went home to Australia.

Who knows what would have developed for the Masters Apprentices had Wheatley found the gumption to dine at the Old Barn in the summer of 1970? He would probably have found himself dining with Stigwood and his mother, and may well have ended up sitting talking music with Stigwood neighbour Ginger Baker until 4.00 in the morning.

Success breeds success. Stigwood's ALS arm, headed by Beryl Vertue, had two hit TV situation comedies on its hands in 1970 with Johnny Speight's *Till Death Us Do Part* and Galton and Simpson's *Steptoe and Son*. In Los Angeles, American television producer Norman Lear was reading *Variety* when he came across a story about the success of *Till Death Us Do Part* on the BBC in Britain. This success had been achieved despite the fact that lead character Alf Garnett was a bigot and misogynist. Contacting Beryl, Lear did a deal to take the show to the US. In those days it was unheard of for an American network to air a foreign program, even if it was in English. Lear's deal gave him all the *Till Death Us Do Part* scripts and the right to create an American version of the show.

Lear turned Alf Garnett into Archie Bunker, creating *All in the Family*. The show proceeded to fall at the first hurdle. US network ABC rejected the raw sitcom after two pilot episodes were shot in front of live audiences, a first for American sitcoms. Opposition network CBS picked up *All in the Family* on the strength of a third pilot, putting it to air in January 1971. Nine seasons would follow. For five of those seasons, *All in the Family* would top the Nielsen ratings, the first program ever to win over five consecutive years.

Lear would go back to Beryl Vertue in 1971 and buy the rights to *Steptoe and Son*. Turning this into the Americanised sitcom *Sanford and Son*, with an all-black cast, Lear would sell it to ABC, who'd passed on *All in the Family*. Going to air in 1972, *Sanford and Son* would become another hit for Lear, running for six seasons, coming in at number two behind *All in the Family* and knocking timeslot competitor *The Brady Bunch* off TV. Courtesy of these two British creations, as well as spin-offs including *Maude* and original sitcoms, Lear would become one of America's most

successful television producers. Meanwhile, in the UK, Speight, Galton, Simpson and Stigwood all did very nicely, without having to lift a finger; the royalty cheques just kept rolling in.

Back when *Hair* premiered on the London stage, Stigwood had announced that it would be the first of many shows he would produce in the West End. Since then, finding the right shows, and the right partners, had not been easy. He parted company with John Nasht, and David Conyers left Stigwood-ALS to try his hand as an independent producer. *Sing a Rude Song* had been a measured and mildly successful next step for Stigwood as he kept his eye open for larger theatrical opportunities.

Two big opportunities came knocking on his door in 1970. Established producer Michael White brought him the first. After White secured the UK rights to a cheeky musical review called *Oh! Calcutta!* his lawyer Oscar Beuselinck suggested he partner with Stigwood. Through his established book of investors, White had the capacity to raise the money to stage the show, but Beuselinck knew White was nervous about tackling it on his own. For *Oh! Calcutta!* involved the cast performing nude throughout, plus plenty of lewd language, and was sure to court censure and controversy, if not bring the vice squad calling.

White and Stigwood had never met before they went to dinner to discuss this project. They clicked at first bite. While Stigwood liked pretty males and White liked pretty females, it was a case of opposites attracting. Besides, both enjoyed partying all night long. 'I liked him immensely,' White would say. Stigwood, in turn, appreciated White's knowledge of and taste in art. In the 1960s, White had staged the first London exhibitions of avant-garde artists including the then unknown Yoko Ono. Stigwood happily went 50/50 with White to produce *Oh! Calcutta!*, agreeing that, like tag-team wrestlers, one of them would always be in the ring as rehearsals progressed at the Roundhouse Theatre at Chalk Farm.

Created by Kenneth Tynan, *Oh! Calcutta!* featured sketches written by noted creative spirits including Samuel Beckett, Sam Shepard, Edna O'Brien and John Lennon. The show had first premiered in the US, off Broadway, in June 1969. In London, White and Stigwood opened it in July 1970 to the expected controversy. After three months of full houses, they relocated it to the Royalty Theatre in the West End. *Oh! Calcutta!* would

run in the West End for ten years, racking up 3918 performances and proving a cash cow for Stigwood and White.

That same year, Stigwood saw a new musical revue while in New York, *The Dirtiest Show in Town*. Back in London, Stigwood enthusiastically described it to White: ‘The nudest, prettiest and dirtiest show ever staged.’ Written and directed by Tom Eyen and set in a Greenwich Village bar, this satire on pollution had a strong gay-macho vibe. White and Stigwood again partnered to bring this show to the West End. After they opened it at London’s Duchess Theatre in 1971, it would run for 800 performances.

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That summer, as the West End opening of *Oh! Calcutta!* drew near, Stigwood had a much larger launch on his mind. In the spring, David Shaw had convinced him it was time RSO floated a public offering on the stock market. By establishing RSO as a public company, Stigwood, Shaw, Polydor (now trading as Polygram) and all the smaller shareholders in the existing RSO private company could cash in their shares. Stigwood had given 1 per cent of the private company to each of the Gibb brothers, to the three members of Cream, and to the ALS directors. All stood to make tidy sums if they agreed to sell. Legal work began for a stock-market launch at the end of summer.

Crafty Stigwood knew that if the Bee Gees were to reform and again make money for RSO, the company’s assets and share value would be substantially increased. So, at the beginning of June, he contacted Robin Gibb. From the grapevine, he’d learned that Robin was lonely, miserable and missing his family. At this point, Robin’s relationship with his father was so bad that Hugh had applied to have his wayward underage son declared a ward of the state. Robin, meanwhile, had done some rapid growing up as he came to realise that his solo success had come at the price of being lonesome. ‘The only people you can share it with is lawyers,’ Robin would lament. Most importantly, he had gone through his money. He and Molly were down to pawning possessions to pay the bills.

Gently, sympathetically, Stigwood talked Robin into meeting with Barry to patch up the family feud. This pair, Stigwood knew, were the key to getting the band back together. Robin had initiated the split, while Barry was still holding a grudge against Stigwood, feeling that he had taken

Maurice's side the previous Christmas. Stigwood knew that Maurice was all for getting the band back together and was even prepared to issue a public apology for the things he and Barry had said about Robin following the split.

During this initial conversation with Robin, Stigwood never mentioned business, never raised the subject of the Bee Gees reforming. At this point, all he brokered was a family reunion. That was all he had to do. The rest, as he well knew, should come naturally. As it did. Within a week, Robin and Maurice were back composing together. Barry, meanwhile, knew precisely why Stigwood had brought about the reunion. 'Robert was putting us back together in his way,' he would later say. And that way was pointing to RSO's public float. For a while after the brothers agreed to reunite, Barry was still stand-offish, preferring to work on new material alone. Nonetheless, he gave Stigwood a commitment to make the group work again.

As the summer ended, Derek and the Dominos returned to the Miami studio to record another album, only for arguments between members to blow apart the sessions, and the group. Clapton walked out. Derek and the Dominos would never play again. Producer Tom Dowd, worried about Clapton's health, got him to meet with Ahmet Ertegun. The Atlantic Records boss had become a father figure to the guitarist, as he had to many other artists. Mick Jagger begged to differ; he called Ertegun his wicked uncle. But as much as Clapton respected him, he took no notice when Ertegun tearfully told him how drugs had destroyed the career of Ray Charles. Returning to England, Clapton locked himself away at Hurtwood and descended completely into the pit of addiction as he began what he himself would call his lost years.

All the legal wrangling involved in separating Robin Gibb from his NEMS contract and the sale of their shares in RSO saw the Gibb brothers sitting through tedious and sometimes rancorous meetings with their lawyers that lasted for weeks. It was only on 21 August that RSO was able to officially announce that the Bee Gees were reforming, with Stigwood assuring the press that their best was yet to come.

The stock market was not so sure, with analysts cynically suspecting this was RSO flotation hype. After the very public acrimony of the brothers' split, some in the media doubted a Bee Gees reunion was possible. Others couldn't see it lasting. Others still felt that the Bee Gees had nothing left to offer; they were yesterday's people. As for Eric Clapton, another former prime asset for RSO, he had disappeared. To many 'experts', this Stigwood float was without substance.

As the September float date approached, the Bee Gees came together in public for the first time in over a year for Barry's 1 September marriage to Linda Gray; he'd divorced Maureen the previous year. A little over a week later, on the first day of the listing, less than 25 per cent of the company's shares were taken up on the London Stock Exchange. *The Sunday Times* described it as 'the biggest flop of the new issue season'.

To get shares moving, Stigwood told Barry Gibb that, for the sake of all original RSO shareholders, including the Gibbs themselves, the company must convince investors its shares were good value by quickly creating a hit new single. Barry assured Stigwood the group was up to the challenge, and over the next few weeks Stigwood and the brothers considered old demos and new compositions from Barry, Robin and Maurice individually and from the three of them combined. Twice, an A-side was chosen, then discarded, before the final decision was made.

On 6 November, Polygram launched the latest Bee Gees single. Both sides, 'Lonely Days', with the lead sung by Robin, and Barry's 'How Can You Mend a Broken Heart', were new compositions written and recorded on the same September day. Racing up the charts, the single became a monster double-sided international hit. The Bee Gees were back, bigger than ever. Remaining shares in Robert Stigwood Group Limited were gobbled up.

In Adelaide, Stigwood's now seventeen-year-old nephew Ron opened a letter from his uncle to find a single Robert Stigwood Group Limited share inside. Ron would receive annual dividend cheques for years to come.

As the autumn of 1970 began to turn chilly, the four members of Slade drove into an estate at Beaconsfield, southwest of London. This was Barry Gibb's new English country property, complete with a playing field, which this weekend had been turned over to a charity football match. Celebrities

littered the pitch. Ginger Baker was in goal for one team. Slade's drummer, Don Powell, would remember Stigwood and the three Gibb brothers appearing on the house's terrace, waving down to the crowd, then retiring back indoors, like royalty.

Stigwood was never enamoured with Slade's sound. Worse, Chas Chandler had convinced the band's members to shave their heads. Skinheads were never Stigwood's style. Even the fact that Stigwood supposedly fancied the band's lead singer Noddy Holder was not enough for him to keep them in his stable. It was economics that finally convinced Stigwood to cut Slade loose: their first two Polydor singles and album had gone nowhere. Shortly after this charity soccer match, Stigwood let Chas Chandler buy him out of the Montgrove partnership for £5000. Chandler moved out of 67, taking Slade with him.

Chandler subsequently let Slade grow their hair long. Within eighteen months, the band was charting. Their 1973 single 'Cum on Feel the Noize' went straight to number 1 in the UK. By the end of the 1970s, Slade would score twenty top 10 hits in Britain, six of them number 1s. Although the group would never achieve quite the same level of success in America, they would sell more than six million records worldwide. While Stigwood had sold the goose that laid golden records, he would never admit to any regrets about letting Slade go. His attention was now fixed elsewhere.

17.

Enter Rice and Lloyd Webber

‘Robert never thought big – he thought massive!’

Tim Rice

STIGWOOD’S NEXT BIG opportunity of 1970, one of the most momentous years of his career, came in the persons of two long-haired young Britons with stars in their eyes and a hit LP on their hands. The previous year, Stigwood had turned them down when they first approached him. This time, he would take them to Broadway.

Tim Rice, a tall, gangly youth with shoulder-length blond hair and thick lambchop sidewhiskers, had worked as a junior executive at the Norrie Paramor Organisation, which managed acts including Cliff Richard and the Shadows. Rice was boarding with the family of his much shorter and shyer friend Andrew Lloyd Webber in South Kensington, and had succeeded in interesting Norrie Paramor in the musical that he and Lloyd Webber had written, *Joseph and the Amazing Techicolor Dreamcoat*. In late 1968, the pair recorded the musical’s then score for an LP that would be released by Decca the following January.

Although that album and two singles from it subsequently failed to set the charts on fire, they were good enough, within a month of the album’s release, for two businessmen to offer the pair a management contract. Sefton Myers was a property developer who dabbled in the entertainment industry. As his partner in the Rice-Lloyd Webber enterprise, Myers brought in David Land, a London agent who handled the Harlem Globetrotters and Dagenham Girl Pipers. Both men were old enough to be the boys’ fathers, but both recognised an opportunity when they heard it. After Lloyd Webber wrote to Myers on another matter, the financier invited the pair to a meeting with Land and himself, and offered them a contract guaranteeing a

minimum of £25 a week each for three years, repayable against earnings, plus 75 per cent of everything their musical work brought in.

Lloyd Webber, twenty and unemployed, had been prepared to sign up at once, but the cautious Rice couldn't bring himself to quit his regular job. His songwriting partner had a strong musical pedigree: a classical composer father, Dr William Lloyd Webber, who ran the London College of Music, and a brother, Julian, who was developing into an exceptional cellist. Rice, on the other hand, could boast not a single lyricist on his family tree.

As a stalling tactic, Rice had suggested they employ a lawyer to check the Myers-Land contract. That lawyer recommended higher salaries, scaled over the three years of the contract, and a signing fee of £500 each. After Myers and Land accepted these changes without blinking, and despite the offer of a raise from Norrie Paramor, Rice finally agreed to sign in April 1969. A new company, New Ventures (Theatrical Management) Limited, would own the pair's output, with Rice and Lloyd Webber holding 50 per cent of the shares, Myers and Land the rest.

Over the next few months, the now full-time composers struggled to find a subject for their next project until Rice revived an old musical idea of his, based around the last days of Christ. David Land was far from thrilled with *Jesus Christ Superstar*, but gave the pair their heads as he tried to figure out how to interest a theatrical producer in such a seemingly outrageous concept. At least Land was astute enough to see that, as evidenced by *Hair* and *Oh! Calcutta!*, controversy sells, although none of the producers he approached saw it that way.

So, Rice and Lloyd Webber decided to duplicate their *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* strategy. While not a commercial success, that album had attracted financial backers. Why couldn't a *Jesus Christ Superstar* album win them a theatrical producer? The newly established UK branch of American recording company MCA agreed to fund recording of the album. MCA would release a *Superstar* single, and if that sold well, follow it up with a double album. Crucially, New Ventures retained the 'grand rights' covering stage and screen performance of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Rice and Lloyd Webber had then made their first approach to Stigwood, hottest producer of new musicals in town. At the very least, they'd hoped to secure an RSO artist to perform on the album.

‘We’d like to be involved with you,’ Rice had enthusiastically told Stigwood at their 1969 meeting.

‘That’s very nice,’ Stigwood had replied, ‘but you have a manager [Land], you have a music publisher [Leeds Music] and you have a record company [MCA]. I can’t see what we can do together.’ When Lloyd Webber suggested Stigwood stage the musical once the music was released on record, the Australian had responded, ‘If it works out, I’d be delighted to.’ It was a polite dismissal. Frankly, Stigwood never expected to see them again.

Rice and Lloyd Webber commenced recording *Superstar* at Olympic Studios that October. To sing the role of Christ, Rice hired friend Murray Head, then a member of Stigwood’s *Hair* cast. Their other vocalists included Yvonne Elliman, a striking seventeen-year-old Hawaii-born American girl of Irish-Japanese-Chinese descent with a sweetly delicate voice, and Notting Hill’s Trinidad Singers. Joe Cocker’s Grease Band and a fifty-six piece orchestra provided the musical accompaniment.

Four hundred recording session hours later, they had their double album. When Murray Head’s *Jesus Christ Superstar* single was released in November it was to a bemused British reception. In contrast, in the US, MCA took out full-page trade press ads promoting it. In early January, the single entered the *Billboard* chart at number 109, beginning a slow rise to the top. The album, when it was released, took up longtime residency on the American charts.

On the back of the record’s US success, by the autumn of 1970 David Land was fielding offers from theatrical producers. One was from Stigwood. He had heard Murray Head’s ‘Jesus Christ Superstar’ single when Paul Nicholas played it to him. ‘I flipped over it,’ Stigwood said. ‘I thought it was sensational.’ To secure the rights, he proposed to take the show straight to Broadway. ‘Robert never thought big,’ says Tim Rice, ‘he thought massive.’

Land considered Stigwood the best bet, and when the Australian learned the two young men would be in New York in December, he set up a meeting. The impresario had only recently taken a lease on a six-storey brownstone townhouse on the Upper East Side, and, sending a champagne-equipped limousine to collect Rice and Lloyd Webber from their hotel, he had them brought to the house for a dinner prepared by his personal chef and served by his butler.

Peter Brown joined Stigwood, Rice and Lloyd Webber for dinner that night in Manhattan. Pushed out of the Beatles' Apple Corps by Allen Klein, Brown was employed by Stigwood as president of RSO in the US. The presence of the Beatles' suave former personal manager was contrived by Stigwood to impress Rice and Lloyd Webber. Which it did. They came away from the dinner mildly drunk, and convinced they could trust the producer. They had just one condition to partnering with him: David Land must remain integrally involved.

The deal the pair and Stigwood signed at 67 in London the following year saw Stigwood buy 50 per cent of New Ventures, which was renamed Superstar Ventures Limited, and Land remained personal manager to Rice and Lloyd Webber, retaining his small Wardour Street office. In addition, Rice and Lloyd Webber received £10,000 signing cheques, more money than either had ever seen.

Stigwood threw himself into bringing *Jesus Christ Superstar* to the Broadway stage, which would prove one of the most testing ventures of his career. Launching *Superstar* in New York before London made a lot of sense. Not only did the album go to number 1 in the US, then dip, only to return to the top spot two months later, MCA released a new single from the album, Yvonne Elliman's haunting 'I Don't Know How to Love Him'. Receiving plenty of airplay, it went into the US top 30 and reached number 47 in the UK. Meanwhile, Australian Helen Reddy had a worldwide hit with her own full-throated version of the same song. Other cover versions popped up like mushrooms after the rain. 'The *Superstar* phenomenon', as it was becoming known in North America, begged a stage show.

Establishing a production budget of US\$700,000, Stigwood set David Land to work rounding up British angels to invest in the show. MCA, which already had skin in the game via the music, introduced their film arm Universal Pictures to the impresario. In March, Stigwood was able to announce a three-way deal between Superstar Ventures, MCA and Universal. In return for investing in the stage show, Universal acquired the right to produce a movie based on it within three years.

Stigwood soon also announced that the show would open in October at the 1500-seat Mark Hellinger Theatre, one of Broadway's largest venues. Part of the delay would be caused by structural renovations to accommodate the show, which included cutting through steel girders forty-five

centimetres thick to install elevators that would rise up to deliver various players to the stage mid-production.

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During this period, Stigwood kept Peter Brown busy looking for a US TV network to buy the Bee Gees' *Cucumber Castle*, with Beryl Vertue flying in as support. Vertue invariably found herself the only woman sitting around tables of daunted male executives. She later told Ron Stigwood, 'When they called me "dear", I knew I had them.'

In his *Cucumber Castle* sales pitch, Brown reminded American executives that the Gibb brothers were among the most covered recording artists of all time. Five of their numbers alone had been covered a hundred times, recently by the likes of Elvis Presley and Glen Campbell. The hype was to no avail. *Cucumber Castle* still stunk, and no American network was going to buy it.

Rice and Lloyd Webber were enjoying the *Superstar* ride. Rice travelled around Europe promoting the album and deflecting criticism that his lyrics were sacrilegious. As was to be expected, that criticism was strong in Italy, home of Catholicism, but Rice found an unexpected ally when Vatican Radio began playing the album. Lloyd Webber, meanwhile, had tracked down an unusual gift for Stigwood by the time he and Rice joined their producer on 16 April for his thirty-seventh birthday party – one of the few remaining Simon Scott plaster busts, now collectors' items.

On 1 June, Stigwood announced he had signed Frank Corsaro to direct *Superstar*. With a solid Broadway background, Corsaro also possessed an excellent reputation in the classical music field, which pleased Lloyd Webber. Changing circumstances dictated that casting would not be for one show, but three. For, inspired by the *Superstar* album, in the United States, Canada, Australia, even in Germany, unauthorised bootleg stage productions of *Jesus Christ Superstar* had sprung up; scores of them, some by church organisations. No one had sought, or paid for, the rights to stage the show. They'd simply bought the album. To counter these pirate productions, Stigwood made two tough and expensive decisions.

The first step was to launch legal action against every unauthorised production, wherever it occurred in the world, if admission was being charged. This would see Stigwood branded ‘ruthless’ by the British press, a label he would never lose in the UK. Not only was Stigwood protecting his and Universal’s investment, he was, he said, protecting the integrity of the show by preventing the often abysmal unauthorised renditions ruining the reputation of *Jesus Christ Superstar* and its creators.

Rice and Lloyd Webber wanted to attend the larger bootleg productions, just to see what was being done with their baby, but Stigwood instructed them not to go anywhere near them. If spotted, their presence could be taken as endorsement. Some of the leads from these pirate productions later turned up at auditions for the official show. According to Stigwood, none were good enough to appear in the chorus, let alone play a lead.

Secondly, Stigwood set up two authorised no-frills touring versions. Launched before an audience of 14,000 in Pittsburgh on 12 July, these concert versions appeared, without sets or costumes, in cities throughout the US leading up to the Broadway opening in October. To mount these touring shows, Stigwood hired the William Morris Agency, which put together a tour management team led by the director of WMA’s music division, Steve Leber, and WMA lawyer David Krebs.

The *Superstar* touring shows would have the added advantage of allowing the most outstanding performers in each forty-member touring cast to transfer to the final Broadway cast, making the tours the best form of rehearsal for the main event. And Stigwood would rake in US\$2.5 million in door receipts from the tours’ first ten weeks on the road.

The legal campaign was led on Stigwood’s behalf by New York lawyer John Eastman, father of Linda Eastman, Paul McCartney’s wife. Eastman put an army of fifty lawyers into the field in twenty US states and abroad. When the Broadway show opened, Stigwood would admit to a legal bill of \$150,000. Tim Rice would estimate the final legal bill was more like \$1 million. With many respondents fighting injunctions, litigation continued into the following year.

One case in Australia involved the Loreto Convent in Kirribilli, Sydney. Being of the opinion that no one had exclusive rights to Jesus Christ, they were selling \$12 tickets to their students’ version of the Rice and Lloyd Webber creation. When the case came to court, the judge found that music

mistress Sister Muirhead, the nun behind Loreto's bold move into corporate Christianity, 'had emerged with very little credit, and was untruthful'.

When news of this case reached Rice and Lloyd Webber, they paid an actress to don a nun's habit and deliver a fake writ to Stigwood. For just a moment, Stigwood thought she was for real, colouring an embarrassed red as he accepted the 'writ'. He was in on another of the pair's pranks when Rice dressed as a woman to 'audition' for the part of Mary Magdalene. Convinced that they were mocking this poor young woman, the audition pianist walked off in protest when Stigwood and Lloyd Webber, sitting in the stalls, fell about laughing at Rice's excruciating attempt to sing 'I Don't Know How to Love Him'.

Meanwhile, a gangly Italian-American youngster of seventeen auditioning for a part as one of the apostles in New York caught Stigwood's eye, even though he failed to receive a call-back. Sitting in the stalls that day, Stigwood considered the aspirant too young to be an apostle. But he noted on a yellow legal pad: 'This kid will be a very big star.' That kid was John Travolta.

Rice had already earmarked Yvonne Elliman to play Mary Magdalene, and at his request Stigwood flew her to the US, signed her to RSO and cemented her into the Broadway cast. When first offered the stage role, Elliman was reluctant, saying she was too young to play the mother of Jesus. It had to be pointed out to the teenager that Mary Magdalene was not Jesus' mother, but his 'girlfriend'. What she thought when told Mary Magdalene was a prostitute is unrecorded.

The enormous publicity generated by the legal cases and touring shows created a Broadway box-office rush. Racking up \$1 million in advance bookings, *Jesus Christ Superstar* established a new Broadway record. In the meantime, Stigwood licensed the first foreign staging of *Superstar*, in Australia, partnering with Harry M. Miller, who had a well-thought-of production of *Hair* running Down Under. Central to the deal, following a Sydney season Miller would take the show to Adelaide to feature in the Adelaide Festival of the Arts. At that time just hitting its straps, the Adelaide Festival was becoming one of Australia's leading cultural events. 'I've wanted to do something for the festival ever since it started,' said Stigwood with anticipation and pride.

A new problem emerged in late July, eleven weeks out from the Broadway opening. Stigwood had become uneasy about director Frank

Corsaro's plans for the show after he hired a designer who came up with a very dark, austere look. One summer night, Corsaro solved that problem for Stigwood, at the same time creating another. After being involved in a car smash, the director was rushed to hospital. One element of the crash threatened to blow up into a scandal that would delight and ignite the tabloids.

Stigwood went in search of a lawyer: John Eastman had his hands full with the *Superstar* actions. Besides, Stigwood needed a New York attorney adept at brushing scandals under the carpet, fast. He was directed to Freddie Gershon. Young, immaculately dressed, reeking of expensive cologne and with a taste for the finer things in life, Gershon was, as one former associate describes him, 'slippery as an eel, but very effective'.

'When I finished my assignment three hours after meeting him,' says Gershon, 'there was never a record of an accident, there was no scandal and Robert Stigwood perceived me as someone who could discreetly make magic.' Officially, it hadn't happened. To this day, Gershon has declined to reveal precisely who or what that accident involved. 'I do not believe,' he says, 'that the fiduciary relationship with either a lawyer/client or partner terminates on the death of the client/partner.' What we do know is that, in return for Corsaro's silence, and resignation, Stigwood paid out his contract for \$40,000. David Land told Tim Rice that Corsaro received a DCM: 'Don't Come Monday.'

Stigwood was so impressed with Freddie Gershon, that same day he invited him to join the Robert Stigwood Group. Gershon turned him down, preferring to keep working for himself. But he was not averse to taking briefs from Stigwood. 'I acted as an attorney for him and the company,' says Gershon modestly today. In fact, he became Stigwood's go-to lawyer and fixer in New York from that day forward.

With Corsaro removed from the equation, Stigwood moved to quickly hire a new director. His choice was *Hair* man Tom O'Horgan. No fan of the *Jesus Christ Superstar* album, O'Horgan wasn't interested at first. So Stigwood upped the ante. O'Horgan, telling a friend he couldn't turn down the ridiculous amount of money the producer was offering, signed on. Stigwood gave him a simple brief: scrap Corsaro's plans and spice up the show.

O'Horgan wouldn't disappoint, although at one point there was a major blow-up when he gave the role of Judas to Ben Vereen. Rice and Lloyd

Webber wanted Carl Anderson, who'd received good reviews for his tour performances in the role. Stigwood backed his director's choice. Both Vereen and Anderson were black, and casting a black as the bad guy who shafted Jesus would generate protest from the African-American community. O'Horgan stuck to his guns, and his casting, and Stigwood stuck by O'Horgan.

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As the days to *Jesus Christ Superstar's* opening night counted down, Stigwood flew members of his own family into New York from around the world for a three-week holiday they would never forget. Brother Bill led the Adelaide contingent. Having left the RAAF the previous year, he now worked as an electrical mechanic in Adelaide. Bill was accompanied by Judith, Ron, Joanne, Heather, Claire and her new husband John, Gordon, and Gordon's friend Mrs Grey. From London came Gwen, bringing, not husband David, but a male friend twenty years her junior. In private, Stigwood was furious; considering the sacrifice David had made for Gwen, this was no way to treat him. But Gwen was adamant she would not be seen in public with her ex-convict husband. Neither was she prepared to travel alone. Her gentleman friend was kept out of photographs.

After five days in New York, Stigwood had his clan whisked by helicopter to his rented Southampton 'cottage' for the weekend. Next, he flew them down to Nassau in the Bahamas for a week aboard a chartered luxury yacht. Then it was back to Manhattan, where they moved into Stigwood's townhouse. Newlyweds Claire and John occupied Stigwood's top-floor bedroom, the others bedrooms on the floor below.

Stigwood vacated the townhouse to set up his *Superstar* headquarters in a lavish Waldorf Astoria suite. While his family members were chauffeured around town in Cadillacs, to shop on 5th Avenue and visit tourist attractions including the Empire State Building, Stigwood spent long hours on the show as it went through previews. Three previews had to be cancelled after problems with the new-fangled radio microphones, a problem solved by suspending most of the mikes from above.

After the Stigwood family attended the final preview as Robert's guests, Bill Stigwood came away unsure whether he liked what he'd seen. Bill wasn't alone. Lyricist Tim Rice was torn between loving and hating it,

while composer Andrew Lloyd Webber was revolted by what he'd seen, and would sit through opening night deep in depression. 'A vulgar travesty!' he declared.

Many critics agreed. *Life* magazine would describe the show as 'Jesus Christ Superstar the Circus'. And that was how its composer saw it, a giant circus of visual effects which totally distracted and detracted from his music. While Lloyd Webber had been predicting disaster for months, Rice was prepared to go along with Stigwood's judgement, as was David Land. After all, the producer had batted every challenge out of the park.

As the after party at Tavern on the Green raged into the early hours of 13 October, Rice was still unsure what to think. In the end, O'Horgan's production would only be seen outside New York in a staging he did in Los Angeles. Rice, upon reflection, doesn't think it that bad. O'Horgan's Broadway production ran for over two years, with 711 performances. The investors more than got their money back.

Very much aware of Lloyd Webber's dislike of O'Horgan's production, for the 1972 London staging of *Jesus Christ Superstar* Stigwood turned to Australia to sign a director with a fresh approach. Twenty-seven-year-old Jim Sharman, who directed Harry M. Miller's Australian productions of *Hair* and *Superstar*, was something of a *wunderkind*, having, at twenty-one, rocked Sydney with an avant-garde production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* for Opera Australia. He agreed to do the West End production of *Superstar* on condition he could bring along his Australian production designer Brian Thomson.

Between the Broadway premiere and the West End premiere, licensed productions of *Jesus Christ Superstar* opened in Sydney, Paris, Munster (Germany), and Stockholm and Gothenburg (Sweden). The Gothenburg show was an arena concert, running over ten nights before 74,000 people in February 1972, with the role of Mary Magdelene played by young blonde singer Agnetha Faltskog, then a member of a quartet struggling to find its feet. The following year, the quartet would adopt a new name: ABBA. A year later, ABBA would be world famous.

The German and Swedish *Superstar* productions were successful, if brief, but two attempts in Paris, theatrical and concert versions, flopped badly, even though Tim Rice loved them and personally directed the concert

version. Despite the fact that several numbers did well on the Gallic hit parade, the French stayed away in droves. The only good thing that came out of the Parisian exercise was a firm and lifelong friendship forged between Stigwood and dynamic blonde, bespectacled French producer Annie Fargue, who tried her heart out to make *Superstar* work in her homeland.

Stigwood proudly attended the March 1972 Adelaide Festival opening night with Rice, Lloyd Webber, Harry M. Miller and mother Gwen, whom he'd flown out from England for the event. Stigwood and Miller co-hosted the after party, held at the home of Robert Porter, former Adelaide lord mayor, and attended by 350 guests including Bob Hawke, president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and a future prime minister of Australia.

Hugely impressed with Harry M. Miller's 'publicity dynamo' Patti Mostyn, Stigwood promptly offered her a job with RSO. 'She was an extraordinarily capable girl,' Miller himself said. 'You could hand her the spark of an idea and it would come back expanded.' Mostyn accepted, excitedly jetting off to join the RSO family, working closely with Stigwood assistant Jeff Tornberg.

'Mr Miller was furious,' says Mostyn today. Within a matter of months, the work-all-day, party-all-night RSO culture proved too much for Mostyn. 'I was too young for that lifestyle. Mr Miller flew over and brought me home.' Stigwood would forgive Mostyn, contracting out RSO business to her after she set up her own publicity outfit in Sydney in 1975.

The success of the Australian production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* cemented Stigwood's confidence in young director Sharman. Yet, when Sharman came to England, he told the show's principals he was ditching the style and substance of the Australian production he and Brian Thomson had created, to try something different in London.

'Brian and I, influenced by discussions with Robert, Andrew and especially Tim Rice, did *Superstar* the great service of treating it simply,' Sharman would say. The Australian director and designer allowed for a little modern spectacle in their London staging, but approached the score with great respect. Sharman later expressed the opinion that this was

possibly Lloyd Webber's best score, a twentieth-century opera in the tradition of the great operas. 'I liked it, and treated it seriously.'

In July, as *Superstar*'s London rehearsals progressed under Sharman, Stigwood employed forty-two-year-old Bob Swash as RSO's theatrical executive producer. Swash, son of a music-hall performer, had grown up in the theatre and had produced thirty shows in London and the provinces. *Superstar* was his first responsibility with RSO.

Despite Swash's undivided attention and reverential treatment by director Sharman, Lloyd Webber was increasingly nervous as *Superstar*'s West End premiere approached. Sales of the *Superstar* album, although exceeding more than two million worldwide, had been mediocre in Britain. What if *Superstar* imploded on the London stage? His career could be killed.

Dreading failure on his own doorstep, Lloyd Webber became increasingly unhappy with what Sharman did with music and cast. Very unhappy. At 2.00 in the morning, less than seventy-two hours before *Jesus Christ Superstar* was due to open at the Palace Theatre, Lloyd Webber, with a sheepish Rice in tow, dragged Stigwood from his bed.

'You'll ruin us! You'll ruin us!' Lloyd Webber wailed, before declaring that he was withdrawing his score from the show unless Stigwood fired Sharman and the cast and started from scratch.

Rice, infected with Lloyd Webber's pessimism, backed his creative partner's call. As always, Stigwood steadied the ship. 'Robert dealt with our ludicrous quest with tact, calm and a lot of champagne,' says Rice. The show would go on. And on. The West End run of *Jesus Christ Superstar* would last more than eight years, becoming the longest-running musical in British history. The following year, Sharman would direct another new musical in London, for Michael White, and direct the movie that stemmed from it: *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, written by a member of the *Superstar* cast, Richard O'Brien.

West End casting for *Superstar* had been completed two months prior to the August premiere. Paul Nicholas had set his cap on securing the role of Jesus, and, preparing feverishly for his audition, won the part. Only later did he discover that Sharman, Lloyd Webber and Rice were all against awarding him Jesus' mantle. Stigwood pulled rank. 'For more than twenty-five years he has been telling me he fought for me to get that role,' Nicholas said in 1999. It would make Nicholas' career.

Nicholas' lawyer father Oscar Beuselinck was rather proud when his boy was anointed Britain's first Jesus. After telling client Geoffrey Ellis about it one day in June, he remarked, 'Since Paul's going to play the Son of God, just think what that makes me!'

Jesus Christ Superstar's West End premiere was a triumph. As he had for *Hair*, Stigwood hosted an after party at the Old Barn, this time around the floodlit, now completed swimming pool. Even the Bee Gees were in attendance, and Jim Sharman watched as his dazzled designer Brian Thomson chatted with idol Robin Gibb. Tim Rice, for a reason he couldn't later remember, didn't imbibe as the champagne flowed that summer's night, but he joined in the fun. He would recall several fist fights and most of the attendees ending up skinny-dipping in the pool. Pretty much a typical Australian barbecue.

Even as *Superstar* was commencing its record run in the West End, Stigwood turned his attention to the movie adaptation. Together with Universal Pictures, he settled on a UK-based director for the project. Canadian Norman Jewison had relocated with his family from Hollywood to England in 1969, and over the previous seven years the forty-six-year-old had racked up a stunning list of hit movies: *The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*; *In the Heat of the Night*; *The Thomas Crown Affair*. It was his sweeping 1971 film adaptation of stage musical *Fiddler on the Roof* that won him the job.

By this stage in his career, Jewison worked as both producer and director on his projects, and Stigwood let him go away and make the movie without interference. When Jewison said he wanted to film entirely on location in Israel, Stigwood agreed. Because Tim Rice was keen to move into screenplay writing, Stigwood allowed him to knock out a first draft screenplay, and Rice had a ball, writing for a cast of hundreds. His screenwriting ambitions were soon crushed.

Without a word to Rice, Jewison canned the lyricist's budget-blowing effort and commissioned former journalist Melvyn Bragg to write a fresh screenplay. Bragg had previously penned screenplays for Ken Russell movies about composers Debussy and Tchaikovsky, and dancer Isadora Duncan. A year ahead of the shoot, Jewison and Bragg flew to Israel and tramped around the desert selecting their locations. Bragg subsequently

delivered a screenplay involving a small cast of modern-day hippies, travelling players who arrive at a ruined temple to act out the last days of Christ.

Like the stage show, the film would be entirely ‘sung through’, without a word of spoken dialogue. The Israeli Government, not averse to cashing in on Christ, loaned Jewison a platoon of Patton tanks and a brace of fighter jets for the shoot.

As his Christ, Jewison considered numerous singers, Micky Dolenz of the Monkees and teenage heart-throb David Cassidy among them. After casting sessions in the US, he returned to the UK with his cast almost finalised. In LA, he’d attended a local stage production to see one Jesus candidate, Ted Neeley, who’d understudied the role on Broadway. Neeley missed that night’s performance through illness, but his agent was able to convince Jewison to see him over lunch before he flew out. Trying to look the part, Neeley turned up in a false beard.

Jewison subsequently flew Neeley to London for a screen test, as he did Carl Anderson, who was up for the role of Judas. In the end, he chose both. Neeley brought a raspy voice and chiselled good looks to the production, while Anderson would subsequently play Judas in touring productions of *Superstar* for more than thirty years. Jewison gave Yvonne Elliman her now-accustomed role of Mary Magdalene, and, with casting complete, went off to the desert for forty days and forty nights to make his movie, the last feature film ever shot in Todd-AO widescreen.

Rice and Lloyd Webber went on location for just three days, accompanied by David Land and journalist Nik Cohn, who would write a disparaging piece about the shoot for *Playboy*. Lloyd Webber was unhappy with what he saw and heard. Jewison brought in conductor Andre Previn to arrange Lloyd Webber’s music, and Lloyd Webber subsequently refused to sit through the completed movie. ‘I hate the film,’ he said, years later. ‘I can see what Norman Jewison was trying to do, but I could never look at it.’

By the time the movie opened in the US in August 1973, the *New York Times* would report that Jewish groups were concerned it would stir anti-semitism: ‘The religious controversy that accompanied the stage production when it came to Broadway two years ago has shown no sign of dying down.’

That continued controversy was a godsend for the box office. Jewison’s film, a mini-masterpiece of sweeping Judean desert vistas and semi-clad

hippies singing and dancing in impossible heat, would do well around the world. In the UK, *Superstar* became the eighth top-grossing movie of the year. In the US, both Neeley and Anderson would receive Golden Globe awards for their performances.

18.

Joseph, Jeeves, Evita and a Red Cow

‘Just write RSO on it.’

Robert Stigwood

IN THE LATE autumn of 1972, as pre-production for the *Superstar* movie was building up a head of steam, Stigwood found the time, and the courage, to fly all the way to Japan. He went in the company of Ahmet Ertegun and Earl McGrath, president of Atlantic offshoot Clean Records.

In Tokyo, the trio took a three-bedroom suite at the city’s best hotel, and the night before they were due to meet a delegation of Japanese record company executives they hit the town. Staying out until the very early hours, Stigwood fell asleep in the suite’s sitting room. He was still asleep, naked, when the Japanese arrived. So Ertegun and McGrath tipped an ice-bucket filled with water over him, then opened the door. The Japanese businessmen were met with the sight of Stigwood dashing across the suite, soaking wet and trying to wrap a bed sheet around himself.

‘Good morning, Mr Stigwood,’ said the Japanese, bowing, without batting an eyelid.

Once Stigwood had dressed, he joined the Japanese and his colleagues for the appointed meeting. At meeting’s end, the Japanese gave the Australian their business cards and a red papier-mache animal which looked like an inscrutable hippopotamus.

‘Ushi,’ said the Japanese. ‘Moo-Moo.’

‘Ah,’ Stigwood replied, accepting the animal. ‘A cow.’

To be precise, it was an ox. The Japanese went on to explain that 1973 would be the year of Ushi, and, as Stigwood admired his little red cow, assured him it would be lucky for him. ‘Good health and good fortune,’ they said. Little did they know how right they were.

On the long flight back to London, Stigwood had many hours to think. The time had come, he decided, to again launch his own record label. On the flight, he decided on a name, RSO Records, and secured an agreement from Ertegun to distribute his product in the US. As soon as he landed, Stigwood commissioned designers to come up with a logo for his label, and began looking for offices close to 67 Brook Street for the new arm.

When David English walked in through the black doors at 67 that December, he had no idea why he was there. It had started with a phone call from Gini Smythe.

‘Hi, David,’ said Gini. ‘Robert would like to see you.’ She didn’t tell him why.

English was the twenty-seven-year-old chief of publicity at Decca, working with the likes of Tom Jones, Engelbert Humperdinck and the Stones. With long wavy hair, a neat beard and an expensive suit, he had the look of a regency dandy, or a rock star. Yet despite mixing with pop-music royalty, he still lived at home with his mother.

Gold records lined the stairs English apprehensively climbed that day with fashionably flared trousers flapping around his ankles. At the first-floor executive suite, blonde Gini showed him into Stigwood’s office. Over the fireplace, English noted an oil painting of scriptwriters Galton and Simpson. He failed to notice the small red papier-mache cow that sat on the mantle below the portrait.

Rising from behind his glass desk, Stigwood beckoned English and shook him by the hand. After both took seats, there was a long pause, before Stigwood said, ‘You’re the one, David.’

English frowned uncertainly. ‘Me?’

‘Yes, you’re the one. I’ve decided to start my own record company, and *you* are going to make it the greatest in the world.’ He went on to ask what salary English wanted, what make of company car he wanted, and when he could start.

English knew that Stigwood famously never took ‘no’ for an answer. His mind racing, he remembered that top English footballers earned £100 a week, so he asked for the same. And a BMW. Stigwood didn’t blink. It was agreed that English would start with RSO in January.

‘Now, RSO Records,’ Stigwood continued. ‘What logo would you suggest?’ He had been far from happy with the designs submitted to him so far.

English recalled reading in the *Evening Standard* that in Japan 1973 would be year of the cow. ‘Tell you what, Robert. The Beatles formed an Apple. How about a cow? It’s lucky in Japan.’

Smiling, Stigwood came to his feet, walked to the fireplace, and took up the red papier-mache cow. ‘Good health and good fortune,’ he mused, recalling the words of the Japanese record executives. He handed the red cow to English. ‘Just write RSO on it.’

Excitedly hurrying away, English gave in his resignation at Decca. Stigwood promptly announced the creation of RSO Records, with English as label manager, which was reported by the very interested music press. When the new arm’s manager arrived for work in the new year, he found that Stigwood had taken elegant and superbly equipped offices for RSO Records down the street from 67, at 46 Brook Street, immediately opposite Claridge’s. Chandeliers, leather sofas, a massive sound system, a fully stocked walnut drinks cabinet: English felt as if he’d died and gone to record-industry heaven.

By this time, Stigwood had given English a green BMW and a new title, general manager. English, who, like all good publicists, had a talent for exaggeration, would later incorrectly recall that the brass plaque on his new office door on his first day read ‘D. S. English, President’. He would eventually win that title, but first he had to build RSO Records. As a starting point, Stigwood handed him his first artists on a plate: the Bee Gees and Eric Clapton.

The Bee Gees’ latest album, *Life in a Tin Can*, recorded in LA the previous year, was released on RSO in the US in January, and the group took off for a North American tour in February, with the album released in the UK the following month. Neither the album nor a single from it, ‘Saw a New Morning’, would sell well, with critics declaring that the band had gone stale.

That January, too, Clapton emerged from seclusion to play a charity concert at Finsbury Park’s Rainbow Theatre with Pete Townshend, Steve Winwood, Ric Grech and drummer Jim Capaldi. David English was there with recording equipment to tape the show. He would release the resultant album, *Eric Clapton’s Rainbow Concert*, on RSO in September.

Clapton arrived backstage at the Rainbow late, flabby and stoned, apologising to Townshend and Stigwood for keeping them; he'd had to wait while current girlfriend Alice Ormsby-Gore – Pattie Boyd was still with George Harrison – adjusted his best suit trousers at the last minute after he'd put on weight binging on chocolate. Clapton was clearly still drug-addicted, but having practised for ten days in Ronnie Wood's basement, he got through the gig, before submerging back into drug-induced oblivion at Hurtwood Edge.

For RSO's first single, English, who would acquire the nickname 'the Loon', as in, a lunatic, decided to record Tim Rice, with the pseudonym of Rover, singing 'How Much Is That Doggie in the Window' backwards. By English's own estimation, the single sold eight copies. He soon received a phone call from the chairman.

'Interesting new release,' said Stigwood. 'Remember, David, you're the one.'

Stigwood would never panic, would persevere with people he placed in important positions after they'd disappointed him, for their sake and his own. RSO Records had too much riding on it for him to change jockeys in the first straight. That year, English would put out a Derek and the Dominos double album on the red cow label, made up of previously unreleased live material, and the cast soundtrack to Rice and Lloyd Webber's *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

The reemergence of *Joseph* had begun with producer Frank Dunlop, who staged a version of the musical at the Edinburgh Festival in September 1972 which received excellent reviews. Stigwood and David Land had quickly gone up to Edinburgh to see the show, after which Stigwood decided to bring it to London for a tryout at Chalk Farm's Roundhouse. At the same time, Michael White was approached by Granada, publishers of the music, who were interested in the show's stage possibilities. Stigwood teamed with White and Granada to stage the show in London.

Because he was unhappy with the first half of the musical, Stigwood told Rice and Lloyd Webber to totally rewrite it for the West End. Not entirely satisfied with the work the pair subsequently presented him, Stigwood then commissioned RSO clients Galton and Simpson to write comedic dialogue around Rice and Lloyd Webber's songs for the first half, which became known as 'Jacob's Journey'. This version opened at the Albery Theatre in the West End in February 1973. After several weeks of

flattering reviews but mediocre houses, 'Jacob's Journey' was ditched and Rice and Lloyd Webber totally rewrote the show, adding three catchy new songs whose influences ranged from country and western to the French can-can.

Yet, not even this, or the cast album, could save *Joseph*. Stigwood would pull the plug in September, closing the show after a seven-month run and after he, White and Granada had made a significant loss. In time, the show would prove popular with repertory theatre companies around Britain, going on to become the most performed rep musical in the country. Royalties from these performances would extinguish the losses incurred by the London productions, although that would take seven years. In the 1980s and 1990s, major *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* revivals would find greater success, and make big money, around the world.

Despite the costs associated with *Joseph*, at the beginning of March the Robert Stigwood Group would report that it had more than doubled profits over the past six months, forecasting a profit of \$2.25 million for the year to the end of September. *Jesus Christ Superstar* had contributed 29 per cent of the group's earnings.

Around this time, Michael White let Stigwood in on an investment in an American stage musical that would debut in the West End that June, *Grease*, starring then unknown American actor Richard Gere. White had been given the opportunity to invest £10,000 in the show. When he offered Stigwood 50 per cent of his action, the Australian happily parted with £5000. Although Stigwood was only one of several investors in *Grease*, he would use his influence to have Paul Nicholas cast as male lead Danny once Gere left the show, and Elaine Paige as female lead Sandy. Running at the New London Theatre, a graveyard for many musicals, unlike its hit Broadway cousin this production of *Grease* would fail to make money for its investors.

Independent of White, Stigwood then also put up the money to bring another hit Broadway show to London. He would open Stephen Schwartz's *Pippin*, directed and choreographed by the legendary Bob Fosse, at Her Majesty's Theatre in the West End on 30 October.

In the second week of April 1973, Stigwood was on a jet flying with Ahmet Ertegun and Earl McGrath to Paris to join 500 delegates attending the four-

day Atlantic Records twenty-fifth-anniversary sales convention at the Meridien hotel. En route, Stigwood and McGrath got hold of Ertegun's passport and pasted a lewd photo over Ertegun's mug shot. Ertegun only discovered the change when he presented it to an unimpressed French immigration officer at Paris airport. It was Stiggy's payback for the rude awakening in Tokyo the previous autumn.

Stigwood returned to London in time for his latest theatrical opening night in the West End. *Two Gentlemen of Verona* premiered at the Phoenix Theatre on 27 April. Michael White had also brought Stigwood into this show, a modern musical based on Shakespeare's play of the same name. Produced by Broadway *Hair* producer Joe Papp, with music by *Hair*'s composer Galt MacDermot, it had won the Tony award for best new Broadway musical in 1971.

In London, *Two Gentlemen of Verona* received great reviews but never once played to a full house. It would close after 237 performances, again leaving White and Stigwood out of pocket. White believed there was nothing wrong with the show, except its title. The young audience targeted by the musical thought it must be a staid Shakespearean affair, whereas it was as contemporary as *West Side Story*'s modern take on *Romeo and Juliet*. The experience taught White a valuable if expensive lesson: 'If you are going to adapt any classic to a musical, find a totally new title.'

With *Superstar* still packing them in at the Palace, and having done the running repairs to *Joseph*, Rice and Lloyd Webber began working on a new show. Both were dedicated fans of the books of British author P. G. Wodehouse, and had decided to put Wodehouse hero Bertie Wooster and his butler Jeeves to music. Even before a note was written, Stigwood and Michael White agreed to produce.

After David Land and Peter Brown sweated through contract negotiations with ninety-year-old Wodehouse's US lawyers, Rice drafted a libretto. But, as he and Lloyd Webber commenced work on the first songs, Rice began to have second thoughts, worrying he could never do Wodehouse's work justice. Driving back from a writing session with Lloyd Webber in Devon, Rice decided he wanted out. This was motivated in part by the fact he'd become obsessed with another idea, based on the life of the wife of an Argentinian dictator.

Just weeks earlier, Rice had heard the end of a BBC Radio program about the rags-to-riches life of Eva Peron, or Evita as she became known in Argentina. When Rice told Lloyd Webber he was bailing out of *Jeeves* to work on his Argentinian project, which Stigwood signalled he was prepared to back, the lyricist expected his friend to drop the Wodehouse project. But Lloyd Webber surprised him by ploughing on with *Jeeves*, finding himself a new writing partner for the musical, playwright Alan Ayckbourn.

Thirty-five-year-old Ayckbourn, renowned in British theatre for his witty and very successful 1965 play *Relatively Speaking*, was developing what would go on to become his next hit, *The Norman Conquests*. Although Ayckbourn initially only committed to writing the *Jeeves* 'book', the show's storyline, he later also put lyrics to Lloyd Webber's music, the first song lyrics Ayckbourn ever wrote. So began a slow and tortuous journey to a trainwreck. Meanwhile, another disaster was unfolding for Stigwood, on Broadway.

Paul Jabara was a twenty-five-year-old American singer-songwriter who'd been in the London casts of *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* and was linked, on a personal level, with Stigwood. He'd sold Stigwood on a musical he'd co-written with Bette Midler in mind, *Rachael Lily Rosenbloom (And Don't You Ever Forget It)*. Stigwood had convinced Ahmet Ertegun to put his money, and the money of friends, into the production, taking the show straight to Broadway, giving Ertegun a producer's billing and giving Atlantic the soundtrack rights.

The production, which Bette Midler turned down, struggled through rehearsals, then laboured through previews from 26 November. On 1 December, it was announced that the show would not open. Stigwood was already hurting from the failure of *Pippin* in London: despite ongoing Broadway success, *Pippin*'s West End production lasted a brief eighty-five performances and cost Stigwood a packet. Jabara's concoction compounded the pain, hugely. *Rachael Lily Rosenbloom* cost, and lost, its producers \$650,000. Stigwood personally refunded the investments of Ertegun and his friends. While Jabara would continue writing songs, most notably the 1982 hit 'It's Raining Men', his *Rachael Lily Rosenbloom* would go down as one of Broadway's greatest flops of all time.

Stigwood, his losses covered by the spectacular success of *Superstar*, moved on, turning his attention to film-making.

19.

Tommy Brings Back Clapton

‘I have never seen anyone dole out such a staggering degree of punishment to their body in the pursuit of such an astonishing degree of fun.’

Anonymous Stigwood associate

WHEN PETE TOWNSHEND wrote the 1969 Who concept album *Tommy*, he envisioned it as a genuine rock opera performed on stage and film. Back then, Townshend and Who co-manager Kit Lambert had jotted down a movie treatment based on the music, but it wasn't until Townshend bumped into Chris Stamp in a London street in the summer of 1973 that a *Tommy* movie began to look possible.

Stamp had just left a meeting with Michael Carreras of Hammer Films, who was interested in developing *Tommy* for the screen. Carreras had even lined up a director, Ken Russell. Townshend was immediately interested, but there was a problem. Stamp and Lambert had fallen out, and Lambert was threatening to take legal action to prevent any film going ahead unless he received a big slice of the pie. The threat of litigation eventually frightened off Carreras, so Stamp went to his old flatmate Robert Stigwood, who was looking for a new movie project to develop on the back of the success of the screen version of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

With the audience for a *Tommy* movie already built by the album, Stigwood quickly took it on. ‘I considered this a positive move,’ Townshend later said, ‘not only because Stiggy and Kit were friends and he promised to deal with Kit kindly, but because of our longstanding relationship with Stiggy.’ Stigwood bought Lambert off, signed a deal with Townshend, approved Russell as director and scriptwriter, then took the idea to Los Angeles to shop it around movie studios.

Despite their success with the controversial *Superstar*, Universal declined to be involved in a movie with a drug-related plot. Other studios

were equally uninterested. The best reception came from Columbia Pictures, which had just lost a fortune on *Lost Horizon*, one of the most expensive flops in Hollywood history. Columbia's owners had subsequently put a limit on their budgets: no production was permitted to exceed \$3 million. Even when Stigwood undertook to put in his own money, studio bosses Leo Jaffe and David Begelman were far from enthused about *Tommy*. It took young Columbia production executive Peter Guber to push approval through for Stigwood. Guber knew a hit when he saw one. He would later produce *Flashdance*.

Stigwood promised Columbia he would pack the film with 'names' from both sides of the Atlantic, and on his return from LA told Townshend about the stars he was signing up, Oliver Reed and Jack Nicholson among them. Although Townshend disagreed with many of his casting choices, Stigwood had his way. 'Stiggy's explanation of the Hollywood star system,' Townshend would say, 'was succinct and persuasive: We-Have-To-Have-Them.'

One star objected to by Townshend was ravishing Swedish-American redhead Ann-Margret, who would play the mother of Roger Daltrey's character even though she was three years younger than him. Stigwood was talked into signing Ann-Margret by her ambitious Hollywood agent Allan Carr, who threw some of Tinseltown's best parties. Short, pudgy, campy Carr impressed him so much with his out-there ideas, Stigwood hired him to market the film, giving him a \$150,000 budget and instructions to secure maximum media attention.

Townshend and the other Who members all had screen roles, with Roger Daltrey playing Tommy, the 'deaf, dumb and blind kid' at the heart of the story. To play Tommy's opponent the Pinball Wizard, Stigwood wooed Elton John for months before finally signing him. For the role of the Acid Queen, Stigwood chose Tina Turner, now out of the shadow of abusive husband Ike and making a solo career. Stigwood even found a supporting role for Paul Nicholas. Later, Stigwood would rate his casting for *Tommy* the best of his career.

Appointing Beryl Vertue executive producer, he would only appear on set the day shooting wrapped, armed with champagne and plastic cups for cast and crew. Otherwise, *Tommy* was Vertue's baby. She still rates it one of her favourite achievements.

Meanwhile, Townshend offered Eric Clapton a part in the movie. After being hooked for three years, Clapton had put himself through drug rehabilitation and kicked heroin. He credited his then-girlfriend's father David Ormsby-Gore with getting him clean, although Stigwood had also played a part. Having worked out that his client was spending £1000 a week on dope, Stigwood sent him a fibbing message that Clapton's bank account was empty and he would have to start selling possessions to pay his bills.

After completing rehab on a Welsh farm, Clapton was ready to come back to work. A limo conveyed him from Wales to Pinewood Studios for his *Tommy* scenes. He did manage to get drunk with Who drummer Keith Moon following the shoot, but, with booze now his only vice, he was ready to start planning his future with Stigwood, who, he knew, had always believed he would come out the other side of his addiction tunnel. 'Although it was an enormous gamble for him,' Clapton said, 'he stuck by me.'

After Clapton made an appointment to see him, Stigwood had Gini Smythe track down Tom Dowd in the US. Dowd was in the middle of a recording session at the Idlewild South Studios in Miami when told that Stigwood was on the phone. Dowd was mystified; Stigwood never called him personally.

'Oh, boy, what does he want?' Dowd growled. Although usually only dropping everything whenever his wife or Ahmet Ertegun or Jerry Wexler called, he lifted the phone.

'Tom,' said Stigwood, 'Eric's back.'

Dowd knew immediately what this meant, and was overjoyed. Stigwood asked him to book studio time for Clapton to record an album, and to put together a backing band using as many former Derek and the Dominos players as possible. As Dowd happily made the arrangements, RSO rented a big white house on the seafront at Golden Beach, just outside Miami, where Clapton could stay. That house, at 461 Ocean Boulevard, would soon find its way into music history. Stigwood also had Gini book first-class air tickets from London to Miami for Clapton and for Yvonne Elliman, who he'd decided to send along to sing backing vocals.

When Clapton came into 67, Stigwood, sitting behind his glass desk, asked him what he wanted to do.

'Make a record,' Clapton replied.

With a smile, Stigwood handed him his Miami air ticket.

‘I remember thinking how great his foresight was,’ Clapton would say.

On 4 April, summoning Pete Townshend, Elton John, Long John Baldry, Ric Grech and Ronnie Wood to support their friend, Stigwood staged a snap press conference at Soho’s China Garden restaurant, where, with a cleaned-up Clapton sitting on the stairs, he announced, ‘Eric is back!’ As proceedings transferred to the Old Barn, Stigwood declared, ‘We just want to have a raving party to celebrate Eric’s return to work.’ They did: Clapton and friends jammed until 5.00 am.

Through April and May, Clapton put down an album at Criteria in Miami. Although he arrived without a single idea, everything came together. First, he fell in lust with Yvonne Elliman. Heroin destroys the libido, and Clapton made up for three years as a monk by consummating an affair with Elliman. She was one of his backing vocalists on a reggae track Clapton put down with Tom Dowd. After a friend played Clapton a record by virtually unknown Jamaican band Bob Marley and the Wailers, he became obsessed with it. He laid down his own version of ‘I Shot the Sheriff’ just for fun. Later, he asked Marley what the song actually meant, but never received a coherent explanation. Clapton’s new love of all things Caribbean would result in him making a home on Antigua, and establishing the Crossroads drug rehabilitation centre there.

Stigwood, looking for a single to release ahead of the album, zeroed in on ‘I Shot the Sheriff’ as soon as he heard Clapton’s version, as did Ertegun. Clapton wasn’t sure the track was good enough to even be included on the album, but bowed to Stigwood’s wisdom. As for the album, he named it *461 Ocean Boulevard*.

In May, while Clapton was recording and enjoying the warm embraces of Florida and Yvonne Elliman, Stigwood went up to Liverpool with London theatrical producer Michael Codron to see a new musical, *John, Paul, George, Ringo and Bert*. Written by university student Willy Russell, this was a comedic take on the rise and split of the Beatles. Russell had acquired permission to use a swag of Beatles numbers, and most were sung by the narrator, twenty-six-year-old piano-playing Scottish folk singer Barbara Dickson.

Liking what he saw, Stigwood immediately signed up Russell, Dickson and the grand rights to the show, and teamed with Codron, who’d never put on a musical before, to premiere *John, Paul, George, Ringo and Bert* at the West End’s Lyric Theatre in August. This launched Willy Russell’s

mainstream career. He would go on to gain fame and fortune writing *Educating Rita*, *Shirley Valentine* and another hit musical starring Barbara Dickson, *Blood Brothers*.

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As he had with the Bee Gees, Stigwood gave Clapton a personal manager from within RSO ranks. Roger Forrester was an RSO booking agent, who, prior to working for Stigwood, had run the Speakeasy club. Clapton already knew Forrester, and liked him. Although Forrester thought Stigwood's tour schedule for Clapton's return too heavy, Clapton was well and truly up for it.

In the third week of June, Forrester joined the new Eric Clapton Band, comprising players from the Miami recording sessions, including Elliman, as they flew to Sweden in an RSO-chartered jet. As had become his habit with the Bee Gees, Stigwood was using Scandinavia as a proving ground for new material before the main event in America. Stigwood also went along and, at the first show, at Copenhagen's Tivoli Gardens on 19 June, kept the local promoter locked in conversation after he threatened to shut down the stadium's power as Clapton played well over time to a massive and adoring audience.

Stigwood had paid a posh Copenhagen restaurant to stay open late for the tour party to eat after the show. He sat Yvonne Elliman beside him at the big table, and when he thought she wasn't looking, stole the truffle from her bowl. When Elliman caught him in the act, he laughed until he was pink in the face. 'He taught me to keep an eye on my truffle,' she would affectionately recall.

The following day it was on to Stockholm, Sweden, and that night, after Clapton's show at the KB Hallen, the party again sat down to a late dinner. This time the meal was interrupted when it was suggested they all go to a local strip club. Off they rushed to the strip joint, where everyone became rolling drunk. The resilient Stigwood and the hungover tour group flew to the Caribbean the next day. Said one British associate about Stigwood's partying, 'I have never seen anyone dole out such a staggering degree of punishment to their body in the pursuit of such an astonishing degree of fun.'

Having decided that Clapton should rehearse for the North American tour in Barbados, Stigwood rented several beach-side villas there. Villa staff had prepared a dinner of spaghetti Bolognese for their arrival, but Clapton tossed his spaghetti over a band member. An all-in spaghetti fight was soon raging.

Several days later, Ahmet Ertegun and prankster partner Earl McGrath arrived. Taking Clapton with them, they went to Stigwood's villa and trashed it while Stigwood lay in a hammock outside wailing. Clapton then switched sides, with he and Stiggy turning the trashing tables on Ertegun and McGrath. 'It required lots of love and trust to play games like this on a grand scale,' said Clapton.

After the tour launched before a crowd of 70,000 at New Haven's Yale Bowl in Connecticut in late June, Clapton and band would criss-cross North America until the final gig in Miami in August. Meanwhile, 'I Shot the Sheriff', released by RSO, shot to number 1 in the US and number 9 in the UK. It was swiftly followed by *461 Ocean Boulevard*, which became the number 1 album in the US for four weeks straight.

Just before the LP's release, Clapton was playing to a massive audience in Buffalo, New York when he looked to the side of the stage. Roger Forrester was standing there, with Pattie Boyd, love of his life, on his arm. Pattie had just left George Harrison, and Forrester had brought her to Clapton.

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This year, too, Stigwood gave Bob Swash free rein to produce two small shows for RSO. Both reflected Swash's love of comedy. *Aspects of Max Wall*, which ran at the Greenwich Theatre, was a one-man show featuring veteran comedic actor Max Wall. The other was John Burrows' and John Harding's *The Golden Pathway Annual*, a Pythonesque look at the life of a young man growing up in Sheffield in the 1950s. With neither show making money for RSO, Stigwood subsequently instructed Swash to focus on musicals.

Swash was also EP of the RSO show that most interested Stigwood that year, *John, Paul, George, Ringo and Bert*. The West End opening in August attracted stars including Peter Sellers and Rod Stewart. George Harrison was also in the audience. Hating what he saw, he walked out at intermission

and subsequently withdrew permission for the use of his song 'Here Comes the Sun'. Stigwood quickly replaced it with 'Good Day Sunshine'.

Following the premiere, the Australian hosted an Old Barn after party. Once again, it was around the pool and culminated in drunken mass skinny-dipping. For the premiere, Stigwood had brought Barbara Dickson's parents down from Scotland. Dickson was tempted to strip off and join the others in the pool, but was prevented by the presence of her parents. Dickson's father drank gin and tonic that night. He hated gin and tonic. This way, he told his daughter, he could be certain not to get drunk and do something he regretted.

Stigwood had signed Dickson to RSO Records, and while playing the theatre stage at night she spent days in the recording studio putting down the *John, Paul, George, Ringo and Bert* cast album, for release on the red cow label. She also recorded two singles, neither of which went anywhere when RSO released them. Two years later, another Dickson single, 'Answer Me', would become a hit.

Russell's show continued for a year in the West End, returning its investors' money. From very early on in its run, Stigwood was bent on turning it into a movie. Pulling Peter Brown back from the US, Stigwood made him executive producer and gave him a VW Beetle as his company car – a Beetle for the EP of a Beatle movie. He also gave Brown RSO's office boy as his personal assistant, after teenager Miles Tredinnick had asked Gini Smythe to put in a word with the boss to get him a better job. Part of Tredinnick's new role would be as Brown's driver. As he didn't possess a driver's licence, Tredinnick frantically took driving lessons.

Pre-production on the film was well advanced. Willy Russell had written the script, a production team was busy at Elstree Studios, and the stage show's leads, among them Barbara Dickson, Bernard Hill as John and Trevor Eve as Paul, came into the studio for costume fittings.

Then, one day, Brown announced that RSO was not proceeding with the film, without giving a reason for the Stigwood decision. Everyone was out of a job, including Tredinnick, who later fronted the band London, managed by Simon Napier-Bell, and found success writing for TV and the stage. Barbara Dickson heard that the film was canned because Paul McCartney had withdrawn permission for the use of his songs, with McCartney said to object to what he saw as bias in Russell's script, which he apparently felt blamed him for the Beatles' break-up.

Stigwood promptly moved to a plan B. After securing the rights to twenty-nine Beatles songs, in New York he met with director Tom O'Horgan and Robin Warner, set designer for *Hair*. Booking the off-Broadway Beacon Theatre for a November opening, Stigwood gave O'Horgan and Warner the Beatles songs and carte blanche to come up with a new musical. The pair proceeded to conceive *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band on the Road*, an aimless sort of *Hair* with Beatles music, a cast of thirty-four and psychedelic staging. Stigwood even involved John Lennon, who attended several previews and the opening night.

On 17 November, the O'Horgan-Warner extravaganza premiered before a theatre full of celebrities. Even though the opening night audience gave it a standing ovation, the mood at the show's after party at the Plaza Hotel was subdued. Host Stigwood tried to be his usual jolly self, but Lennon sat with a stunned look on his face. He knew the show was a stinker.

So did the critics; reviews ranged from the mystified to the mauling. *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band on the Road* ran for just sixty-six performances before Stigwood pulled the plug. The exercise cost him hundreds of thousands of dollars. Despite this, still holding the rights to the Beatles songs, he was stubbornly determined to exploit them, in a movie. Until he could find the right film partners, the project went on the back burner.

Late in the year, Stigwood hosted another Old Barn party. A farewell party. He now had a smart new legal adviser, Patrick 'Paddy' Grafton Green, whose mother had been raised in Australia. With British income-tax rates then punishingly high, Grafton Green convinced Stigwood to sell up and move to the US. Stigwood was reluctant to go. He adored England, and his house. To always remind him of the Old Barn, a painting, *The Gates of Stanmore*, would hang in his future residences. This farewell party would be one of several he would throw over the next six months as he kept putting off a final departure.

In the party crowd this night was the Faces' Ronnie Wood. 'I was still close to Robert Stigwood,' Wood would reflect, 'at least as close as you could get to him, and I loved going to his big country house ... he threw wonderful parties.' Wood was sitting on an Old Barn settee between the Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger and Mick Taylor, when Taylor leaned over and

informed Jagger that he was leaving the band. Jagger promptly asked Wood to take his place in the Stones. Wood knew that Rod Stewart and the other Faces would not be pleased if he left them, so he turned Jagger down. Two months later, Jagger would repeat the invitation. And Wood would accept, becoming a Rolling Stone.

As usual, Stigwood partied hard that night. But he never lost sight of where he was heading in the new year. In 1975, he would truly begin to make his mark in the USA.

20.

Conquering America

‘He is a great gambler and a genuine entrepreneur.’

Cameron Mackintosh

ONE NIGHT IN February 1975, nineteen-year-old James Daley was at a Beverly Hills party hosted by Allan Carr. There, Daley met John Reid, Elton John’s lover and manager, who in turn introduced him to another partygoer, Robert Stigwood. Daley and Stigwood immediately clicked. Daley had only come over to California from his home in Hawaii for a brief stay, but a few weeks later Stigwood offered him a two-week job helping launch the *Tommy* movie.

‘The two-week job turned into a fifteen-year career,’ says Daley today. ‘Robert’s policy was to hire a new assistant every two years. At the end of the two years, the assistant would move into whatever division of RSO they wanted to: films, television, music publishing, artists management, and of course RSO Records.’ The following year Stigwood would transfer Daley to RSO’s artist management division in LA.

Another new assistant who joined Stigwood at much the same time as Daley would not fall into the same category as the usual Stigwood assistants. His only nephew Ron would turn twenty-one in March 1975, and, as the date approached, Ron’s grandmother Gwen Burrows instructed Stigwood to send the youth on a world trip as a birthday present, after which he was to employ him in New York to learn the entertainment industry ropes. Stigwood duly complied. Ron quit his job as a videotape technician with Channel Nine in Australia and jetted off to Hong Kong, then to London, on the first legs of his fully-paid trip. In London, he enjoyed the tourist sights and the nightlife, and caught up with his grandmother.

Losing interest in the world trip, Ron rang his uncle in New York and asked if he could come directly to the US. Stigwood agreed, and flew him over the following Friday. With Stigwood himself out of town, an RSO executive met Ron at the airport and drove him out to Stigwood's Southampton house for the weekend. On the Monday, Ron was brought into Manhattan to meet up with his uncle, whom he had not seen since the *Superstar* premiere in New York four years earlier.

By this time, Stigwood had given up the rented Manhattan townhouse and bought himself an apartment. As Ron was about to discover, it was no ordinary apartment. The San Remo building sat at 145 Central Park West, overlooking the park, next door to another famous residential building, the Dakota. Erected in 1929, the San Remo consisted of twin towers, each twenty-seven storeys high. The Art Deco building was one of Manhattan's most exclusive addresses, with leading names from stage and film in residence.

The San Remo's doorman escorted young Ron to a private elevator that took him up to the south tower's twenty-sixth-floor penthouse. The elevator doors opened to a vast double-height entry foyer with a sweeping, spindled staircase rising to the twenty-seventh floor, and five bedrooms, all with ensembles. Ahead of Ron, ornate cherry wood and glass doors led to a massive living room equipped with a giant working fireplace. The tastefully decorated room had stunning views to the north, east and west over New York City and beyond. There was an adjoining chef's kitchen, and a spacious library, which, with its own bathroom, could serve as an additional bedroom.

As Ron discovered while being given a tour of the apartment, there were another four bedrooms and two bathrooms for staff, including Stigwood's butler, his chef and his personal assistants. Previous owners of the apartment included Hollywood stars Eddie Cantor and, Stigwood proudly told Ron, Buster Keaton. It was also said that the Duke and Duchess of Windsor had lived here in the 1940s, a royal connection that added to its glamour for Stigwood. Ron was shown his guest bedroom, and the twenty-eighth-floor service space his uncle was converting into a screening room. Within eighteen months, Stigwood would also equip this room as a disco, complete with sound system, lighting and mirror ball.

Ron found he was joining his uncle's staff as a sort of apprentice, in a role without title, definition or boundaries. While Gini Smythe continued to

be Stigwood's London-based executive-PA, watching over affairs there, his executive assistant in New York was Joy McMillan, a strikingly attractive redhead. Handsome young Carl Lolito was Stigwood's new PA. In line with Stigwood's PA promotion policy, previous assistant New Jersey boy Kevin McCormick had just moved up the ladder to work on film projects at RSO's New York offices, which were just along the street at 135 Central Park West. Later, those offices would relocate to two floors on West 57th Street.

Ron's duties would vary, but with Stigwood now increasingly putting his time into screen productions, his nephew's projects were almost all movie related. So began Ron's life in the rapidly expanding Stigwood business empire. It was going to be a hell of a ride.

One project being considered by Stigwood over the previous two years had been *Bad*, an avant-garde film being developed by artist Andy Warhol. Stigwood had been genuinely interested, conducting numerous Dom Perignon-fuelled meetings with Warhol and his large entourage, and assigning his then-assistant Jeff Tornberg, who worked on *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Tommy*, to serve as the picture's executive producer. By early March, however, just before his nephew joined his staff, Stigwood had cooled on the \$1.2 million *Bad* project, and pulled out. Tornberg was so annoyed he quit Stigwood's employ to produce the film for Warhol, his departure opening up the vacancy in RSO film production that Kevin McCormick filled.

That March, too, Stigwood took a rough cut of *Tommy* to LA to show Columbia Pictures' bosses. As the lights came up in the studio's theatrette following the showing, there was bemused silence from Columbia's board members.

'Well,' one of them eventually said, 'what do you expect us to do with that?'

'What do you mean?' Stigwood responded.

'Who the hell is Tina Turner?' demanded another studio boss.

Undaunted by his distributors' lack of enthusiasm, and with \$2 million of his own money in the project, Stigwood pushed ahead with the marketing campaign. When the movie opened at the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York on 18 March, the premiere was packed with celebrities and the film's stars, including Tina Turner, who'd just landed back from an Australian concert

tour. Stigwood arrived with his bejewelled mother Gwen on his arm. According to Allan Carr, his guest list that night brought together a combination of 'junk, film, fashion and class'.

The opening-night audience loved the movie, and, in high spirits, transferred to the after party, held in the new 57th Street subway station: Carr's idea. Stigwood made a large donation to the Police Athletic League, and on opening night the NYPD blocked off the streets between the Ziegfeld Theater and the subway station so that party guests could stroll from one to the other. Underground, Stigwood, Carr and a thousand of their 'best friends' partied till dawn. The party then moved to California, for the LA opening at Grauman's Chinese Theatre, complete with searchlights combing the sky, 1940s style. Then it was to London, for the UK opening at Leicester Square.

Today, the entirely sung-through *Tommy* looks like a long-form music video put together by high-school students, with Ann-Margret, Daltrey and Reid overacting in the best silent-movie tradition as they mime to their music tracks. In 1975, some reviewers hated it. Others embraced it as avant-garde. All Stigwood was interested in was the box office. Financial pressures on other fronts made the success of *Tommy* essential.

Returning to New York, Stigwood saw lines stretching around the block outside movie theatres where *Tommy* was showing, and knew he had a hit. Globally, *Tommy* earned close to US\$35 million, seven times its budget. Meanwhile, the movie's soundtrack on RSO raced to number 1 in the album charts. RSO's efficient accounts department quickly dispersed the loot. 'Stigwood's accounting to us was very fast,' said Pete Townshend approvingly.

It was no coincidence that Stigwood backed out of the uncommercial Warhol film. A theatrical financial disaster was unfolding for him in Britain. On 22 March, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Alan Ayckbourn's *Jeeves* opened at the Hippodrome in Bristol. This out-of-town tryout was intended to polish the show prior to transfer to the West End a month later. On its first night in Bristol, *Jeeves* ran for four-and-a-half hours. Much of the audience left thirty minutes before the end, to catch the last buses home. Tim Rice would remark that Lloyd Webber would make all his musicals four hours long unless reined in by a producer.

Jeeves' co-producer Michael White claimed he spotted this problem early and urged the shortening of the show. White had a reputation for being disorganised and uninterested, keeping lists of his investors on loose, handwritten sheets of paper. He would claim he attended two *Jeeves* rehearsals before heading off to America to work on other projects and at that time expressed the belief the show was much too long. Ayckbourn never saw White during rehearsals or previews. White said he expected tag-team partner Stigwood to instruct the show's director, Eric Thompson, to drastically shorten it. Thompson, appointed on the recommendation of Ayckbourn, was also directing Ayckbourn's *The Norman Conquests*, which was soon to open; he'd never directed a musical before.

Stigwood had yet to see the show, having deputised Bob Swash to fill in for him. But Swash had seemingly allowed director and composer to do whatever they wished. Ayckbourn had to this point received just a single written communication from Swash, and doesn't recall him attending rehearsals or asking for the show to be shortened.

The need to cut back the production was only now impressed on director Thompson by Stigwood, from the US. Thompson's response was to delete a character, reducing the show to three-and-a-half hours when it opened for previews on 11 April. Four days out from the West End opening at Her Majesty's Theatre on 22 April, Stigwood finally put in a personal appearance, and, having sat through a lengthy preview, politely but firmly fired Thompson.

Stigwood then convinced Ayckbourn, who had previously directed drama, to take the director's reins. By the time *Jeeves* opened on the 22nd, Ayckbourn had cut it to two-and-three-quarter hours. Many critics would feel that was still two-and-three-quarter hours too long. Stigwood sent Ayckbourn a note on opening night:

'Dear Alan,
A million thanks for making tonight possible.
Love and good wishes,
Robert.'

Reviews of the production were scathing, the worst of Ayckbourn's career. Houses were distressingly poor. On 25 April, with Stigwood back in the

US, Bob Swash wrote to the show's creators, asking them to waive their percentages to allow the show to continue. It proved a futile gesture. Stigwood and White closed the show on 24 May. It had lost them £100,000. One of White's investors, a first-time angel who had put in £12,000, wrote White a stinging letter, declaring that an investment in the Girl Guides would have proven more rewarding. White would never work with Stigwood again. They remained friends, but, unlike Stigwood, White could ill afford to carry losses. Later in his career, he would be declared bankrupt. In between, he would give the world numerous stage shows and movies, memorably not only *Rocky Horror* but *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

RSO released the original cast recording of *Jeeves* in September 1975. Like the show, the record failed. Twenty-one years later, Lloyd Webber and Ayckbourn would revisit the show. Revised and retitled *By Jeeves*, it would have an eight-month season in the West End and a two-month run on Broadway, receiving a warmer critical reception than the original, but still failing to find commercial success. Ayckbourn, for one, was no fan of the Stigwood arm's-length style of producing he witnessed in 1974–75. 'For arm's length,' he says today, 'read barge pole.'

Despite the *Jeeves* debacle, Stigwood was still keen to work with Lloyd Webber, and even more keen for the composer to reconnect with Tim Rice. In May, with *Jeeves* about to close in the West End, their manager invited Lloyd Webber and Rice to join David Land and himself at the Old Barn. Over lunch, Stigwood offered to extend the pair's RSO management contract for another four years and encouraged them to start work together again at once, offering a sizeable cash incentive for re-signing. They asked for time to think it over.

Following lunch, the quartet adjourned to Stigwood's now well used go-kart track, and in the process of champagne-fuelled competition Rice ended up depositing his go-kart in the swimming pool. Stigwood left it where it was for some time. 'As a tourist attraction,' he said. By month's end, Rice and Lloyd Webber came back with a 'yes'. Despite negative mumblings from his creative partner, Rice had convinced Lloyd Webber to commit to another four years with Stigwood, and, after re-signing, they began work on *Evita*.

Following the path they'd established with *Joseph*, the pair would launch with an album. With David Land executive-producing the project, Rice and Lloyd Webber jetted off to Biarritz in France to start writing *Evita*.

Ensnared in a luxury hotel suite, and working to Rice's already drafted libretto, they employed their usual creative process. Lloyd Webber first came up with the music, Rice then added lyrics.

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Following one expensive theatrical failure after another, Stigwood had lost interest in stage shows. With two hit movies, *Superstar* and *Tommy*, and the ongoing US success of the *All in the Family* and *Sanford and Son*, his heart and mind were now fixed on conquering the American film and television worlds. He told new PA James Daley his formula for success: 'The movie sells the TV show, the TV show sells the record, the record sells the movie.'

In May, Stigwood hosted his final farewell party at the Old Barn before relocating permanently offshore. Everyone knew he was serious when he ordered his beloved Rolls-Royce convertible shipped to LA. Young Kevin McCormick was in the crowd for this last party, excitedly telling everyone that Stigwood had appointed him EP of *The Geller Effect*, a planned movie based on an autobiographical book by Israeli illusionist Uri Geller. Stigwood had acquired the screen rights, and the plan was for Geller to play himself, bending spoons to the accompaniment of Bee Gees music. 'Robert would have put Bee Gees numbers into everything if he could,' says nephew Ron.

Beryl Vertue was meanwhile telling party guests about her latest projects for Stigwood. The previous year, she had put ALS's toe in the US television market producing *Cat & Mouse*, aka *Mousey*, a reasonably well received ABC telemovie shot in London and Quebec starring Kirk Douglas and Jean Seberg. This August, RSO's *Beacon Hill* would go to air on CBS. Based on Jean Marsh's British TV hit *Upstairs Downstairs*, the series was set in Boston between the wars. To win American audiences, Stigwood was throwing \$900,000 into the series opener, which would have a massive cast, extravagant sets and music by Allan Carr client Marvin Hamlisch, award-winning composer of the scores for *The Sting* and *The Way We Were*.

In addition, Vertue had signed Jack Lemmon for a made-for-TV movie remake of John Osbourne's *The Entertainer*, was planning a raft of other US telemovies, and was producing an American version of successful British game show *Almost Anything Goes*. Vertue herself had also come up with ideas for a comedy-adventure movie set in Mexico and a Rome-based

love story inspired by a conversation she'd had with a taxi driver in the Eternal City.

This workload meant that Vertue was almost permanently on planes criss-crossing the Atlantic. According to her, husband Clem didn't mind her absences as she booked all her flights through his travel agency. She proudly declared that David Frost had recently rebuked her for challenging his trans-Atlantic travel record.

Gwen Burrows was also at the farewell party, with husband David tucked away in the gatehouse. The pair would shortly return to Australia on an *Australian Women's Weekly* cruise, with Stigwood buying a house for them to live in, at Highland Court, Belair, in Adelaide's foothills. The house had a stunning view across the city to the coast, with Adelaide providing a spectacular light show at night. Once Stigwood and the Burrows had departed England, the Old Barn would be sold, closing a memorable chapter in Stigwood's life.

21.

The Travolta Trilogy

‘Get me the rights. This is a hundred-million-dollar movie!’

Robert Stigwood

STIGWOOD AND LAWYER Freddie Gershon had become bosom buddies. In January 1976, Stigwood, Gershon and his wife, Myrna, flew on the maiden Air France Concorde service from Paris to Rio de Janeiro, where the trio partied and Stigwood had a publicity shot taken at the Oba Oba Club surrounded by scantily clad female dancers. Shortly after, Gershon caved in to Stigwood’s job offers, replacing Peter Brown as the Australian’s main man in New York. In Gershon’s own words, having been Stigwood’s New York lawyer for several years, he now ‘migrated from that role to becoming his partner in business’.

That June, Gershon engineered a reverse takeover of Stigwood’s UK-listed public company by a new private US company, the Robert Stigwood Organization Inc. Stigwood was chairman, and Gershon CEO, replacing David Shaw as Stigwood’s chief lieutenant. This takeover was funded, in part, by Stigwood’s sale of 50 per cent of RSO Records to Polygram, a sale enhanced by the Bee Gees’ recent signature of a new five-year, eight-album contract with RSO. In this deal, Stigwood joined Polygram’s international board and Polygram became RSO Records’ North American distributor, replacing Atlantic. Ahmet Ertegun was not amused. But, as Stigwood is likely to have said to Ertegun, throwing back an earlier riposte, ‘Business is business, Ahmet.’

Adding insult to injury, Stigwood attempted to steal Jerry Greenberg from Ertegun. Greenberg, a Jerry Wexler protégé, was Atlantic’s promotions whiz. Following the release of *Tommy*, David English had stepped down as ‘the one’ at RSO Records to pursue an acting career. RSO’s artists were so fond of English that Stigwood kept him on a retainer

as a ‘consultant’. Going after Greenberg to head up RSO Records in English’s place, Stigwood offered him a share of both RSO’s record and film divisions. Greenberg was sorely tempted, until Ertegun made a counter offer he couldn’t refuse. With Ertegun winning that round, Stigwood hired Capitol Records vice-president Al Coury as his new US-based RSO Records chief.

Stigwood now also officially took up residency in Bermuda, a British colony and famous tax haven, setting up trusts via which he would invest his growing personal fortune. As his Bermuda residence, Stigwood leased Palm Grove, a cedar South Shore mansion. Built in 1954, it came with a celebrated palm garden created by original owner Edmund Gibbons and a vast swimming pool with islands in the middle in the shape of a map of Bermuda. Stigwood’s Palm Grove lease permitted the public to visit the Gibbons gardens during the day. This didn’t bother Stigwood; like the Australian possum, he only came out to play at night.

In July that year, Stigwood hosted a pair of newlyweds at his new Bermuda home, youngest Gibb brother eighteen-year-old Andy and his new Australian bride Kim Reeder. Back in 1974, at big brother Barry’s suggestion, Andy had returned to Australia to launch a music career there. In early 1976, Stigwood heard Andy’s demo tapes, and promptly signed him to RSO. After marrying Kim in Sydney on 1 July, Andy brought her to Bermuda to honeymoon at Palm Grove. ‘We ate five-course dinners,’ Kim later said, revealing that Stigwood was a hands-on host: ‘He cooked the food himself. He’s a pretty good chef.’

Also joining the honeymoon at Palm Grove were Barry Gibb and wife Linda, and Tim Rice and his wife, Jane. Rice had brought along twenty-six *Evita* tracks, freshly minted at London’s Olympic Studios with Julie Covington singing the lead. Nervously, Rice played the tracks to Stigwood and his guests. *Evita* received an enthusiastic reception from all.

Rice and Lloyd Webber’s recording contract for *Joseph*, which predated their time as Stigwood clients, gave MCA the rights to this new album, so RSO Records would miss out, although Stigwood would still reap 25 per cent of all the pair earned via their management contract. After MCA released the album in the US in September and in the UK in November it would quickly go platinum, while two singles from the album became worldwide hits: Julie Covington’s ‘Don’t Cry for Me Argentina’ and Barbara Dickson’s ‘Another Suitcase in Another Hall’.

With Stigwood showing no interest in producing *Evita*, or anything else, on stage, David Land took Rice and Lloyd Webber to see Michael White. Discussions ended after Land had an almighty row with White. Lloyd Webber, determined that *Evita* be directed by noted American theatre director Hal Prince, had meanwhile sent him the album. As Lloyd Webber knew, Prince had previously wanted to both produce and direct *Jesus Christ Superstar*, sending Lloyd Webber a telegram saying so. That telegram had been misdirected, only reaching the composer after he'd committed to Stigwood. Prince now said he wanted to do *Evita*, but was booked solid for the next two years. So, Lloyd Webber and Rice agreed to stall the production until 1978, when Hal Prince was free.

As for Andy and Kim Gibb, following their Bermuda break they settled in Miami. Tim Rice had felt that the talk around the Palm Grove dinner table of shy young Andy becoming an international star was a little premature. Conversely, Stigwood was confident the teenager was ready for stardom, and asked Barry Gibb to write material for him. That October, Barry would take his little brother into Criteria Studios to record his first album, *Flowing Rivers*, with Stigwood choosing a single from this for 1977 release. 'I Just Want to Be Your Everything' was a number written for Andy by Barry in a Palm Grove bedroom while staying with Stigwood.

As a Bermuda resident, under US tax law Stigwood could only spend six months of the year in the United States, so the rest of his time was spent in Bermuda and, less often now, in London, where, after the sale of the Old Barn, he made the Dorchester hotel his home. In the US, Stigwood was spending increasing amounts of time in Los Angeles, developing film projects. There, he rented the Summit Drive mansion of Creative Management Agency (CMA) boss Freddie Fields, who'd recently sold out to International Creative Management (ICM). Formerly owned by Hollywood studio chief David O. Selznick, Fields' Mediterranean-style house came with pool, screening room and audition room. It was on the market, so every now and then stars such as Michael Caine would knock on Stigwood's door for inspections.

Stigwood's focus now was almost exclusively on making movies. Beryl Vertue's RSO television projects had ranged between the disappointing and the disastrous. *Beacon Hill* had been cancelled by CBS after eleven poorly rating episodes; two completed episodes were never screened. ABC's *Almost Anything Goes* game show was canned after one season. RSO

television dramas *The Entertainer*, *And No One Could Save Her*, *Killer Bees*, *Virginia Hill*, *All Together Now* and *Death Screams* all flopped. This meltdown of RSO's TV production slate caused Stigwood to put a halt to further television development apart from a junior version of *Almost Anything Goes* for 1976 release, which would similarly fail, and to put Vertue's movie ideas in the bottom drawer.

In London, meanwhile, the marriage of Stigwood's PA Gini Smythe had fallen apart. 'I was having my own little meltdown,' says Gini today, 'and so Robert sent someone to London to pick me up and fly me to LA for a couple of weeks with him, so he could be sure that I was alright.' Her Tinseltown visit gave Gini a taste of the movie world that her boss was now inhabiting.

Ever loyal to those who were loyal to him, Stigwood switched Beryl Vertue over to *Sparkle*, a low-budget musical movie he was producing with Warner Brothers for release in the spring of 1976 as a *Tommy* follow-up. In theory, *Sparkle* had a lot going for it. With music by Curtis Mayfield, it told the Supremes-inspired story of the rise and split of a black girl singing trio. *Sparkle* was cowritten by its director Howard Rosenman, who'd produced several RSO telemovies, and Joel Schumacher.

Alas, *Sparkle* failed to fulfil its glittering promise. With its low budget as obvious as its shallow plotting, *Sparkle* would join the long list of RSO losers. The movie's theme would be exploited much more successfully in the hit 1981 Broadway musical *Dreamgirls*, which spawned an equally successful 2006 movie, while a 2012 remake of *Sparkle*, made without any Stigwood involvement and featuring Whitney Houston in her last film role, would prove much more satisfying and successful than the original. The only significant thing to come out of 1976's *Sparkle* was its young female star Irene Cara, appearing in her first movie role. Four years later, she would grab fame, in *Fame*.

Several of Stigwood's film deals did return a profit in 1976. The most successful had been brought to him by Allan Carr the previous year. With \$850,000 from RSO, Carr took a Mexican film about cannibalistic plane crash survivors in the Andes, dubbed it into English, and turned it into *Survive*. Most of the studios hated it. One distributor was prepared to take the movie off RSO's hands in a deal that would have left Stigwood out of pocket, but he held his nerve, persuading Paramount Pictures chief Barry Diller to release it.

On the back of heavy Paramount advertising *Survive* became the number 1 movie in the US that summer, its success helped by the fact that it was released before the much better and well-publicised United Artists film *Alive*, which had a similar subject and title. Allan Carr, who had gone into the *Survive* deal 50-50 with Stigwood, bought a house at Malibu with his share of the profits, while RSO got its money back, and some.

The other plus for Stigwood was that *Survive* cemented his friendship with Barry Diller, and secured a new three-year, three-picture distribution agreement with Paramount for RSO productions. Stigwood already had it in mind to make *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* one of those three pictures. Now, he was on the lookout for two more suitable screen projects. In both cases, he wanted solid musical themes.

Another deal had come to Stigwood in 1975 via British producer David Puttnam, of later *Chariots of Fire* fame. First-time English writer-director Alan Parker had written *Bugsy Malone*, a cute little screen musical in which children acted out the roles of Chicago gangsters of the 1920s, based on a story that Parker had told his children on long car journeys.

His cast included thirteen-year-old Jodie Foster and future American TV star Scott Baio. Plus, Puttnam had convinced top Hollywood musical director Paul Williams to write the movie's songs. Parker and Puttnam secured Stigwood's support, and RSO's money.

While *Bugsy Malone* would be labelled 'A Robert Stigwood Presentation', Stigwood had little involvement apart from introducing Puttnam to US distributors Paramount, putting up some of the money, and organising the marketing. RSO Records would also release the soundtrack. Stigwood's nephew Ron found himself employed in the marketing campaign, trying to round up dummy Tommy guns for child actors to tote on a *Bugsy Malone* float that appeared in the annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.

The film failed to do well on its 1976 release in the US, even though Foster had won widespread acclaim earlier in the year for her role alongside Al Pacino in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, and despite Paul Williams winning an Academy Award for his *Bugsy Malone* score. The reception was better around the world, with the film winning the Golden Palm at the 1976 Cannes Film Festival and earning Parker a BAFTA award in the UK for his screenplay. *Bugsy Malone* would end up making a moderate profit.

Meanwhile, on the back of Williams' Oscar win, RSO's soundtrack album sold respectably.

In the first half of 1976, another new movie project brought to Stigwood by Allan Carr would have a profound effect on the Australian's fortunes, and on movie-making history. Carr surprised Stigwood by telling him he'd just secured the film rights to stage musical *Grease*. While *Grease* had failed to return Stigwood's £5000 investment in the West End, it was still running on Broadway to packed houses.

Carr had been lunching at Sardi's, famed entertainment-industry restaurant in Manhattan, when he bumped into *Grease*'s theatrical producers Kenneth Weissman and Maxine Fox, who told him the show's previously optioned screen rights had just returned to them. Carr jumped in, signing a \$200,000 *Grease* screen option deal. Because he didn't have that sort of money in a lump sum, Carr paid in weekly instalments. Before long, he had a disagreement with Weissman over when the rights kicked in. To maximise his Broadway profits, Weissman was holding back release of any movie version until the stage show closed. After mediation through the Dramatists Guild, it was agreed that a *Grease* movie could be released in 1978. Carr came to Stigwood offering him 50 per cent if he put in RSO money.

Stigwood wasn't convinced that *Grease* would work on film, and felt the show's existing music inadequate. Then there was the release freeze until 1978. Carr, determined to win Stigwood over, called on friend Bill Butler, a leading Hollywood cinematographer then working on *Jaws* and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Carr sent Butler to see *Grease* on Broadway, then met him for lunch at a Philadelphia restaurant. Over lunch, Butler storyboarded how the show could work as a movie, using crayons on the paper tablecloth. Stigwood was flying to Philadelphia, and that afternoon would give the pair thirty minutes to sell him on how *Grease* could work onscreen.

The first time Ron Stigwood accompanied his uncle on a flight it had been to Philadelphia, aboard the chartered 'Starship', the Boeing 720 used by Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Elton John and the Stones for US tours. Lavishly converted to carry rock royalty, the jet even had a bedroom. Ron was well aware that his uncle was petrified of flying. As the Starship taxied

in preparation for take-off, and with Stigwood gripping the armrests, the youngster leaned closer.

‘You realise,’ Ron said, grinning cheekily, ‘take-off is the most dangerous part of a flight.’

‘You’re fired,’ Stigwood growled.

Ron laughed, and ignored his uncle, as he would on the other occasions that Stigwood ‘fired’ him over the coming years.

After his latest flight to Philadelphia, Stigwood was met by a limousine and driven to the restaurant where Carr and Butler awaited. He took the meeting in the back of the limo. ‘Stigwood was cold and distant,’ Butler would recall. But after ten minutes of Carr’s sales pitch in the back of the limo, based on Butler’s ideas about hot cars and shooting on location in a real high school, Stigwood nodded. He was in.

On his return to Los Angeles, Stigwood pitched *Grease* to Barry Diller and Paramount’s new creative head Michael Eisner. Diller wasn’t enthusiastic, but Eisner was excited; he had seen the lines outside the Broadway show. Eisner talked his boss around, and a 1978 release date was agreed. So, Stigwood had two of his three Paramount projects lined up.

Unhappy with the way the Uri Geller film was developing, he put that on the back burner, where it would eventually die, and started looking for something that could be knocked out quickly, and cheaply, for 1977 release, to complete the Paramount deal. Fate now played a hand.

Irish journalist Nik Cohn and his wife had recently moved to Manhattan from London. Writing freelance articles to get by, Cohn’s aim was to establish himself as a screenwriter. In London, he’d been one of Stigwood’s go-to journalists, so one of the first people Cohn made an appointment to see once he landed in New York was Stigwood. When they met that April, Stigwood encouraged the Irishman to let him know when he had a good idea for a movie with a musical base, and sent him away.

As weeks passed, Cohn, looking for magazine article material, frequented Brooklyn dance clubs with black disco dancer Tu Sweet. At the 2001 Odyssey Club in Bay Ridge, he found Italian-American kids who loved to dance, and lived to dance. The result was an article he offered to *New York* magazine. Initially entitled ‘Another Saturday Night’, it told of Vincent, a young Italian-American determined to pull himself out of suburban obscurity through dance. A note at the bottom of the piece read: ‘Everything described in this article is factual.’

Clay Felker, *New York's* editor in chief, wasn't instantly enamoured with Cohn's effort. Only after the writer went back to 2001 Odyssey with artist James McMullan, who delivered illustrations of the dancers, did Felker agree to publish, changing the title, to 'Tribal Rites of the New Saturday Night'. After it ran in *New York's* 7 June issue, Stigwood staffer Kevin McCormick saw the article and recommended that his boss take a look. Stigwood read it late on the Friday morning, four days after the issue hit the streets. He rang Cohn immediately.

The writer's wife took the call. 'There's a Rabbi Stigfeldt on the phone for you,' she said to Cohn, having trouble with the caller's accent.

Cohn found an excited Stigwood on the line. 'Nik, you're bloody mad!' the Australian declared, before going on to praise Cohn's *New York* story. 'You have it. This is what I want.'

'Yeah,' responded the laid-back Irishman, 'I've had a few strange phone calls.' Those calls had been from people in the entertainment business, making offers for the screen rights.

'Take none of them!' Stigwood retorted. 'And come straight to my apartment.'

Although Stigwood had a large office at RSO's Manhattan headquarters resplendent with gold and platinum records, he did much of his business from the San Remo apartment. That afternoon, Cohn arrived at the penthouse via the private elevator. Stigwood plied him with champagne. Since moving to the US, Stigwood's champers of choice was Louis Roederer Cristal, which was even more expensive than Dom Perignon.

By the time Cohn and Stigwood left the apartment together that afternoon, Cohn was warm to the idea of selling Stigwood the rights, if allowed to write the screenplay. Saying that his top legal guy would be in touch to iron out details, Stigwood climbed into a waiting limo and headed away to spend the weekend at his Hamptons retreat. In the heavy early evening traffic, he lifted the back-seat car-phone and rang Freddie Gershon at the office.

'Freddie, get me the rights. This is a hundred-million-dollar movie.'

By the following Monday, Gershon had done the deal. Cohn was paid \$10,000 against a final rights fee of \$90,000 on commencement of principal photography. The contract also allowed Cohn to draft a screenplay, without binding the producers to it. Twenty-two years later, Cohn would reveal that, in desperation to sell an article to *New York*, he'd made up the entire story:

Vincent, his gang, the dance contest. Stigwood detractors would chortle that he'd been conned. In reality, the Australian didn't care where the story came from; he just knew it would work on screen.

Stigwood now had his three Paramount movies. First, the Cohn project, with the working title of *Saturday Night* and young Kevin McCormick appointed to ride shotgun as executive producer. *Grease* and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* would follow, to be produced simultaneously and released within five weeks of each other in 1978.

To find a director for *Saturday Night*, Stigwood sent the slender, bright-eyed McCormick around talent agents. After struggling to find an agent who would take him seriously, the twenty-three-year-old eventually came back with a name, John Avildsen, a director with just a single as yet unreleased movie with an unknown star to his credit. This little picture was Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky*.

After seeing a *Rocky* cut, Stigwood signed Avildsen, who in turn recommended a screenwriter, Norman Wexler. With two Academy Award nominations, most recently for his screenplay for the Al Pacino hit *Serpico*, Wexler was in his fifties. A chain-smoking manic depressive, he could sometimes turn violent. At his best, Wexler was brilliant. At his worst, he was a derelict. Stigwood got him at his best.

Nik Cohn's screenplay didn't impress Stigwood. After Cohn read his effort through with Wexler, even he realised how incompetent it was, and bowed out gracefully. Wexler trawled Manhattan and Jersey dance clubs in a trenchcoat before he came back to Stigwood with his first draft screenplay. It was forty pages too long, but it was achingly street savvy, and snapped, crackled and popped with humanity and dark humour. Wexler had changed Cohn's lead character Vincent into Tony Manero, giving him a complex and compelling family life. Liberally peppered with the F-word and the C-word, Wexler's script was gritty, with drug use, a rape scene, and a youth falling to his death from a bridge. Stigwood loved it.

Now began the quest for Tony Manero. Stigwood had been tracking John Travolta's career ever since the young actor's failed *Superstar* audition years before. By 1976, Travolta had a big following with teenage girls as a star of hit ABC sitcom *Welcome Back, Kotter*, playing Vinnie Barbarino, a hip Italian-American kid. He also had a supporting role in one of the big movies of the year, *Carrie*, and had starred in an ABC telemovie, *The Boy in the Bubble*.

There was more. Travolta could sing and dance. He'd released two albums, from which a 1976 single, 'Let Her In', went to number 5 and stayed in the charts for five months. In a touring version of *Grease*, he'd played Doody, one of the T-Birds gang.

Stigwood, who'd had Travolta in mind to play the lead in *Grease* from the moment he'd agreed to go 50-50 with Allan Carr, now conceived the idea of signing Travolta to do the first Paramount movie as well. He approached Travolta's agent Bob LeMond in the late summer of 1976, and Travolta, in LA, read Wexler's script the same day he received it from LeMond. But Travolta worried that Tony Manero was too much like his TV character Vinnie.

At that time, the twenty-two-year-old was living with his forty-year-old girlfriend Diana Hyland, who'd played his mother in *The Boy in the Bubble*. After Travolta's negative read, Hyland secluded herself in the bedroom with the script. An hour later, she came out raving, telling Travolta he had to do this movie. When he countered that Tony was the king of the disco dancers and he wasn't such a good dancer, Hyland assured him he could learn the dance parts.

With Travolta wavering, Stigwood used his ace up the sleeve, a wad of cash. On 26 September, the Australian announced to a lavish press conference at LA's Beverly Hills Hotel that RSO had signed John Travolta to a three-picture deal, for a fee of \$1.5 million, an astronomical amount for a TV actor. The announcement made headlines, not only because of the young star's million-dollar payday. Many commentators predicted that Stigwood would fall flat on his face. No TV star had yet replicated small-screen success on the silver screen. Stigwood begged to differ. Travolta, he said, was different.

The road to *Saturday Night* still had big potholes to negotiate. Soon after Travolta commenced disco lessons with dance instructor Doney Terrio in Los Angeles, dancing to Stevie Wonder and Boz Scaggs, he met with director Avildsen. The feedback from both was not good, and Kevin McCormick began to worry that the movie was going off the rails. Avildsen wasn't happy with Travolta, who, he said, was fat. To get Travolta into shape, he hired former boxer Jimmy Gambina, who'd trained Sylvester Stallone for *Rocky*.

As Travolta buckled down to physical training on top of dance training, Avildsen fell out with screenwriter Wexler, telling him Tony Manero should

work in a clothing store, not a paint store. Not even convinced that Tony should be a dancer, Avildsen wouldn't commit to a choreographer, telling McCormick that maybe Tony should be a painter, an artistic nice guy. For a completely fresh take, Avildsen hired a new writer, Louis La Russo. Stigwood was in Bermuda when the fretting McCormick finally let him know about the problems with Avildsen. Stigwood immediately summoned Avildsen and Wexler to the Palm Grove estate and lectured them on what he wanted: Wexler's script, just cut back a little. Instructing both to do better, he sent them away.

Stigwood spent a lavish Christmas at Palm Grove that year, surrounded by a gang that included nephew Ron, Freddie and Myrna Gershon, Kevin McCormick, Joy McMillan and Gini Smythe. 'Christmas was a blast!' says Gini. For after empty childhood Christmases without his father around, Stigwood now made sure his Yuletides were unforgettable, for him and his guests.

Only once the new year arrived would Stigwood begin thinking seriously about music for his troubled disco movie.

22.

Greasing the Wheels

‘Robert Stigwood said it had to be that way.’

Yvonne Elliman

THE EARLY 1970s had been difficult for the Bee Gees. ‘We couldn’t even get arrested in 1972,’ says Barry Gibb today. Their 1973 and 1974 albums *Life in a Tin Can* and *Mr Natural* had bombed. To resurrect their careers, for their 1975 album *Main Course* Stigwood brought in Arif Mardin, Atlantic’s number one R&B producer, and sent the brothers to Miami to record at Criteria Studios, renting them the now-famous 461 Ocean Boulevard.

When the Bee Gees subsequently sent him their first Miami demos, Stigwood was unhappy. He only liked one new song, ‘Jive Talkin’’, inspired by the brothers’ daily drive from Golden Beach to the studio in Miami, during which they had to use a causeway. Their car’s tyres had made a ‘tickety-tick’ sound crossing the wooden bridge on the causeway, giving them the rhythm, and the song. They plucked the title from the air; Arif Mardin later informed them that jive talking actually meant talking bullshit.

The rest of the new tracks were ballads. Stigwood trashed the lot. Flying down to Miami, he confronted the Gibb brothers. In no uncertain terms, he told them to give him more R&B tracks. ‘I was probably very aggressive with them,’ Stigwood reflected a quarter of a century later. They complied, and *Main Course* not only went gold after it was released, it delivered two smash hit singles for RSO, ‘Jive Talkin’ and ‘Nights on Broadway’, which the group altered at Stigwood’s behest to include a slow middle section.

By the time the Bee Gees were ready to go back into the studio to record their next album, Stigwood had done the Polygram deal that excluded Atlantic, and Ahmet Ertegun was playing hardball, refusing to allow Arif Mardin, who had become like a favourite uncle to the Gibb boys, to again produce them.

Overcoming their disappointment, the brothers were convinced by Stigwood that they could produce themselves. The resulting album, *Children of the World*, proved him right. It went double platinum and generated three hit singles, 'You Should Be Dancing', 'Love So Right' and 'Boogie Child'. In addition, Stigwood gave one track from the album, 'Love Me', to Yvonne Elliman, who turned it into yet another RSO hit.

By the beginning of February 1977, when Stigwood was thinking music for *Saturday Night*, the Bee Gees were in a swanky recording studio in France, at the Chateau d'Herouville, north of Paris, made famous as the Honky Chateau by Elton John after he recorded there. The brothers were mixing a live album they planned to call *Here at Last Live*, and bringing together material for their next studio LP. When Stigwood called from the US to talk music for his movie, he instructed them to drop what they were doing and write disco songs.

Robin Gibb, bristling at the dictatorial stance Stigwood had taken with them over the last couple of years, responded, 'Well, we can't do that, Robert, because we're writing our new album.'

Fortunately for all concerned, brother Barry listened to their manager more attentively.

'Give me eight minutes, Barry,' said Stigwood. 'Eight minutes, three moods. I want frenzy at the beginning. Then I want some passion. And then I want some *w-i-i-i-ld* frenzy!'

Finding the brothers less than excited, Stigwood flew to France, taking along Bill Oakes, his music coordinator for *Saturday Night*. Oakes, a handsome young Englishman from Nottingham, formerly an assistant to Paul McCartney and now an RSO Records executive, had married Yvonne Elliman after Clapton replaced her with Pattie Boyd. When Stigwood and Oakes joined the Bee Gees at the Chateau, the brothers had two new numbers for them: 'Stayin' Alive' and 'If I Can't Have You'. According to Barry Gibb, both Stigwood and Oakes 'flipped out' at what they heard. Stigwood immediately wanted the numbers for the movie.

'But they're for our new album,' Barry retorted.

'Then your album is the soundtrack,' Stigwood firmly responded. He always had difficulty getting the Gibb brothers to read scripts, so, there at the Chateau, he talked them through Norman Wexler's *Saturday Night* screenplay. Now that they had the flavour of the film, and their orders, Stigwood and Oakes left them to compose.

On his way back to the US, Stigwood stopped over in Paris. There was another little piece of music business he wanted to attend to. A state of undeclared war had existed between Ahmet Ertegun and himself ever since Stigwood cut Atlantic out of the RSO picture the previous year. Stigwood hadn't forgiven Ertegun for withholding Arif Mardin from the Bee Gees. Now, he set out to steal the Rolling Stones from Ertegun.

As Stigwood knew, the Stones' contract with Atlantic for distribution of their Rolling Stones Records output on their own distinctive tongue and lips label was up for renewal. He also knew that Mick Jagger was staying in Paris, at the ritzy George V hotel. Taking a suite at the equally swish Plaza-Athenee hotel nearby, he called Jagger. The pair began protracted negotiations over the telephone. In between calls, Jagger rang lawyer Rupert Lowenstein in LA, passing on Stigwood's offers. Lowenstein called Ahmet Ertegun, who, determined to outbid Stigwood, countered each offer.

In the end, the Stones went with Ertegun over Stigwood. Despite the unpaid £16,000 debt from twelve years earlier, Jagger had always remained friends with Stigwood. But business was business, and Mick Jagger was that rare animal, a rock singer with a head for business. On 16 February, the Stones signed a five-year, five-album deal with Atlantic for US rights, with Ertegun putting Earl McGrath in charge of Rolling Stones Records, while EMI got the rest of the world. The deal gave the Stones a \$7 million advance.

Unsuccessful on the Stones front, Stigwood returned to Bermuda. A week later, the Bee Gees sent him demo tapes of new songs 'Night Fever', 'How Deep Is Your Love' and 'More Than a Woman'. All were just what Stiggy was looking for. Influenced by 'Night Fever', he changed the movie's title to *Saturday Night Fever*. Not every song would be performed by the Bee Gees on the soundtrack. For one number, Bill Oakes took the demos home to wife Yvonne Elliman.

'What Robert would like,' Oakes told her, 'is for you to do one of these songs, "If I Can't Have You".'

Elliman was still working in Clapton's band, touring and recording, and loving it. She hated disco. Cream, Led Zeppelin, Crosby, Stills & Nash were her style. But Stigwood was the boss: hers, and her husband's. Elliman recorded 'If I Can't Have You', and after it was also released as an RSO single, becoming a smash hit in 1977, Stigwood would pull Elliman from Clapton's band to go solo. 'Robert Stigwood said it had to be that way,' she

would say. Her preference was to stay with Clapton's band. But, what Stigwood wanted, Stigwood got.

When the Bee Gees' *Saturday Night Fever* demos were delivered to John Avildsen, there was trouble. The director didn't like them – and he was still against using the Wexler script. Yet shooting was due to begin in three weeks. In a panic, Kevin McCormick called Stigwood in Bermuda. Stigwood exploded. Catching the next plane to New York, he was met by McCormick and driven fuming to the San Remo. Avildsen was summoned. The meeting that followed between Avildsen, Stigwood and McCormick in Stigwood's penthouse living room was tense.

'John, Wexler's script is brilliant,' the producer declared. 'I just want ten minutes cut. There will be no new script. Shoot Wexler's.'

Avildsen shook his head. He refused to shoot the Wexler script.

At this impasse, Stigwood was called into the library to take an urgent phone call. Excusing himself, he left the room. He returned just a minute later. 'John,' he said as he strode back in, 'there's good news and bad news. The good news is that you've just been nominated for an Academy Award. Congratulations.' This was for directing *Rocky*, for which Avildsen would subsequently win the Oscar. These tidings made no difference to Stigwood. 'The bad news is you're fired.'

After Avildsen departed, a stunned McCormick looked at his boss. 'Now what are we going to do?'

McCormick was already suffering from a permanent stomach ache that sounded suspiciously like an ulcer. Stigwood had given him a budget of \$2.5 million to make *Saturday Night Fever* and it had already gone over by \$300,000. McCormick was resorting to buying the cast's clothes at retail. Unable to afford studio sets, he'd slated shooting to take place on location. For one scene, a hospital ward would be mocked up in a suburban garage. There was no dedicated production office: McCormick was trying to pull it all together from RSO's offices at 135 Central Park West. The film's script was too long. Travolta's co-star had yet to be cast. And now, with the shoot looming, the film didn't have a director. Yet McCormick's boss was calm. Almost blithely so, in McCormick's opinion. Stigwood totally and genuinely believed that all would be well by the time the cameras rolled.

Stigwood's nephew Ron helped solve one problem. One brisk winter morning while the search for a new director got underway, he came down from the San Remo apartment and tried to hail a cab on Central Park West. A pretty little brunette who lived nearby appeared beside him and similarly tried to find a taxi in the rush-hour traffic.

'Going uptown?' asked Ron. When the brunette said she was, he suggested they share a cab, which they did. As their taxi slowly took them uptown in the bumper-to-bumper traffic, Ron discovered that his travelling companion was actress Karen Lynn Gorney, who'd been in the original cast of TV soap *All My Children*. Gorney's father, Jay, co-writer of hit songs including 'Buddy Can You Spare a Dime', had secured Shirley Temple her first screen acting role.

Ron told Gorney that he was Robert Stigwood's nephew, that he was working on *Saturday Night Fever*, and they were still looking for an actress to play the female lead opposite John Travolta. As soon as Gorney got out of the cab, she found a telephone and called her agent. Ron also mentioned his chance meeting to his uncle. Within hours, Gorney was auditioning for Stigwood up in his San Remo living room; she would always remember a massive Chinese screen on the apartment wall. Stigwood gave her the part on the spot. While her dancing would prove ordinary, many reviewers would warm to Gorney's portrayal of Stephanie, a girl with naive ambitions.

The directorial problem was also soon put to bed. Paramount recommended a thirty-four-year-old who'd done TV work for them, John Badham. He had a single feature to his name, the forgettable baseball movie *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars & Motor Kings*. Born in England, Badham had grown up in Birmingham, Alabama. After studying at the Yale School of Drama he'd started out in Warner Brothers' mail room. His sister Mary had played Gregory Peck's daughter Scout in the classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Moustachioed young Badham, a pragmatic, industrious director with a self-deprecating sense of humour, was the perfect fit for *Saturday Night Fever*. Importantly, he liked Wexler's script. Most of it, anyway. After he flew up to New York from LA, he told Stigwood he was uncomfortable with the rape scene. 'Robert, it's gone over the bounds,' he said.

'It's very key to the theme of the movie, John,' Stigwood insisted.

The rape scene stayed. Badham would find a way of making it acceptable. He had no problem with the script's foul language, not even with 'blow job', which, in *Saturday Night Fever*, would be used for the first time in a mainstream movie. Still, coming from a television background, Badham knew that, unlike British and Australian TV networks, US network TV would not screen movies containing profanities. Badham also knew that, following its theatre run, Paramount would want to further exploit the film by screening it on network television.

'We'll have to cover for TV, Robert,' he warned.

'Don't worry about it,' replied his producer, whose hands-on involvement with US TV was almost nil. 'It'll be fine.'

Badham knew it wouldn't be fine. Without saying anything to Stigwood, in his first script read-through with the cast the director informed his actors he would be shooting all scenes containing profanities twice: once as per the script, and a second time with the bad language 'softened'. Travolta and fellow cast members protested that this would compromise the script's integrity.

'Have you guys ever heard of a thing called residuals?' Badham came back. Actors received residuals every time something they appeared in screened on TV. Travolta and his colleagues agreed to the alternate scenes, and Stigwood would later thank Badham for his initiative. Not only did this allow *Saturday Night Fever* to appear on network TV, Stigwood would later release this self-censored cut into cinemas as a PG-rated version that Travolta's teenage fans could see, adding significantly to the box office.

Others were worried about the script's profanities. As shooting drew closer, Paramount's Barry Diller called Stigwood to an urgent meeting and told him he had to cut foul language from the dialogue. Stigwood offered him a deal. If Paramount increased RSO's cut by 3 per cent to an unprecedented 45 per cent of the gross, he would cut five 'fucks' from the screenplay. Diller agreed. Later, as the movie set box-office records, Paramount executives vowed to never leave Diller alone in a room with Stigwood again. It cost the studio too much.

Badham's driver during the making of *Saturday Night Fever* was Ron Stigwood. The young Australian, who was made an honorary member of the Teamster's Union for the shoot, also drove Ralf Bode, the film's

German-born director of photography. Bode, whose last job had been as second unit cinematographer on *Rocky*, found the DOP responsibility on *Fever* so stressful he developed shingles.

‘Ah,’ said a smiling director Badham when he met Ron for the first time, ‘the heir apparent.’

Ron frequently received this sort of reaction during the years he worked for his uncle, but was never comfortable with it. ‘Robert wanted me to make it on my own,’ he says today. ‘He always said he would teach me, but it was up to me.’

Now began weeks of early rises for Badham and his crew. As shooting commenced in the streets of Brooklyn on 14 March 1977, a crowd of 10,000 lined the sidewalk opposite, calling out to Travolta and making filming difficult. After that, to avoid being mobbed, Badham started shooting at dawn.

Two weeks in, disaster struck John Travolta. For months, his girlfriend Diana Hyland had been undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. On Saturday 26 March, Travolta flew to LA to be with her. She died in his arms the following day.

When shooting resumed on the Monday, Travolta was still in LA. In Brooklyn, Badham shot Travolta’s stand-in walking down the street for the film’s now-famous opening scene. It’s the stand-in’s shoes we see close-up in the finished movie, padding along in time to the Bee Gees’ ‘Stayin’ Alive’, whose demo was pounding out on playback on the day. It’s also the stand-in we see in the close-up of Tony Manero swinging a paint can as he walks.

The next day, Travolta was back on location and burying himself in his work. It helped that in his opening scenes the pizza-shop girl serving him was his sister, Annie, and the female customer in the paint shop where Tony worked was his mother, Helen. Stigwood had brought both on board to support his star. He also kept Travolta close; during the shoot, he stayed with Stigwood at the San Remo apartment.

Travolta says today that Stigwood wanted him to do his main dance scene to ‘Stayin’ Alive’. But Travolta was determined to use ‘You Should Be Dancing’. The film’s star got his way, and also convinced Stigwood to use ‘Stayin’ Alive’ for the opening scene.

To teach Travolta his dance moves for the disco sequences, Badham hired talented black choreographer Lester Wilson. These were shot in the

real 2001 Odyssey disco, atop a glass dancefloor created for the movie, the film's single most expensive prop. Stigwood also ordered one for his San Remo screening room-cum-disco. But Travolta was distraught after he saw the rushes of his first dance scenes. Focusing on Travolta's upper body, Badham cut out his legs, and his routines. The brilliant knee drops and splits he'd mastered went unseen.

In tears, Travolta told Stigwood, 'Robert, I'm off the movie.'

As he did with his other temperamental stars, the producer talked Travolta around, in this case with a promise to show him head-to-toe in the dance scenes. Stigwood usually backed his directors' judgement, but this time he didn't. Badham was instructed to reshoot Travolta's dance scenes as the star wanted. Badham would later admit it was the right decision. Likewise, the director confided to Ron Stigwood that prior to filming he wasn't in favour of using Bee Gees music. Once he heard their new tracks, Badham had to agree with Ron's uncle: this music was going to make the world get up and dance.

When filming ended in New York, post-production moved to LA, where *Saturday Night Fever* was given space at Paramount Studios, above the *Happy Days* TV production offices. In the studio commissary, music supervisor Bill Oakes was teased by Paramount executives about 'the little disco movie' he was working on. Apart from Stigwood and Travolta, no one believed the film would come to much. Stigwood, feeling the shoot should be commemorated, gave a solid gold ingot on a chain to all *Fever* cast and crew when production wrapped.

Ron Stigwood had relocated to LA, moving into Freddie Fields' house with his uncle and occupying a desk at Paramount. He discovered that working on a movie with John Travolta quickly made him a girl magnet. With his uncle staging regular dinners and parties at the Fields house – Rod Stewart's first date with future wife Alana was at one such Stigwood LA dinner – young Ron took a new girl back there every time.

'You're nothing but a country whore!' a grinning Stigwood one day said to his nephew.

'Look who's talking!' Ron came back.

Stigwood laughed. But it was an embarrassed laugh. He knew that Ron was witness to his sexual lifestyle, which he hid from other family

members. Stigwood staged two types of parties. One was the music and film industry party. Mostly about buttering up business associates, they were always fun, and long. The other was the no-holds-barred gay party. At the San Remo, Stigwood owned the only apartment with open terraces, and, once he moved in, neighbours began complaining about homosexual orgies on those terraces.

At both types of party, the aroma of pot hung heavily in the air. Personally, Stigwood sometimes smoked marijuana and occasionally used cocaine, but he usually steered clear of illicit drugs. Alcohol and cigarettes were enough to feed his addictions.

According to one business associate, Stigwood was a ‘sexual predator’ at his parties, on the prowl for new homosexual conquests. One target of this predatorial activity was British music journalist Chris Charlesworth, US correspondent for *Melody Maker*. The bespectacled Charlesworth was at a party at the San Remo apartment one night, admiring paintings on a corridor wall, when Stigwood came up behind him and, in Charlesworth’s words, ‘propositioned’ him. According to Charlesworth: ‘I explained as nicely as I could that I preferred girls. Whereupon he introduced me to a statuesque redhead from among his staff.’ The redhead was Stigwood’s executive assistant Joy McMillan; Charlesworth failed to interest her.

With *Saturday Night Fever* due for release on 14 December, in the autumn Paramount held preview screenings in LA to allow for fine tuning. The Gibb brothers attended one in company with Travolta. As they stood at the back of the theatre so that patrons couldn’t see them, the Gibbs were appalled. The music had been pulled back so much they could hear the sounds of dancers’ shoes on the dancefloor.

Barry Gibb immediately rang Stigwood. ‘Turn the music up!’ he urged. ‘Directors don’t know anything about music.’

Stigwood duly had the music’s volume increased.

Once *Saturday Night Fever* was released in mid-December, the reviews, and the receipts, were phenomenal. Travolta was nominated for an Academy Award. When the soundtrack wasn’t nominated, Stigwood threatened to sue, an act which soured his relations with the Academy for all time. The soundtrack album, released on RSO a month before the movie premiered and featuring numbers from the Bee Gees, Yvonne Elliman, Kool

and the Gang, KC and the Sunshine Band, MFSB, the Trammps, and several instrumentals from the film's musical scorer David Shire, would sell 15 million copies, becoming history's biggest-selling movie soundtrack to that time.

RSO had an unprecedented five singles in the US top 10 that December, three of them duelling numbers from four Gibb Brothers. Stigwood had held back young Andy Gibb's album and single to coincide with the *Saturday Night Fever* release. Now, Andy's 'I Just Want to Be Your Everything' knocked his brothers' 'Stayin' Alive' from the top position in the US charts, which it held for several weeks before it was in turn displaced at number 1 by 'Night Fever'. With the youngest Gibb brother now also an international RSO star, Stigwood appointed James Daley his personal manager.

In theatres around the world, *Saturday Night Fever* would take upward of \$240 million, eighty-five times its budget, becoming the biggest-grossing musical in movie history. The record would be broken just a year later, by a little movie called *Grease*.

Amidst the euphoria of all this success, RSO Records signed another Australian act, Sherbet, a Sydney band with a string of non-US hits including 1976's 'Howzat', a number 1 in Australia and number 5 in the UK. On condition they rename themselves Highway, RSO put the band on a two-year option. If and when taken up, RSO's option guaranteed Highway a million dollars on release of their first US album, which, the band was told, would follow the *Grease* soundtrack album. In LA, the band settled down to practise, and wait.

23.

Sgt. Pepper's, a Business Deal Set to Music

‘Robert was anaesthetised by his success.’

Freddie Gershon

JUST AS *Saturday Night Fever* was about to explode onto the screen in the autumn of 1977, shooting on *Grease* ended with a wrap party attended by cast, crew and the Bee Gees. Stigwood's involvement with *Grease* wasn't as total as it had been with *Fever*. He commissioned Barry Gibb to write 'Grease', the movie's theme song, to be sung by Allan Carr client Frankie Valli of the Four Seasons, and, with the *Grease* soundtrack to be released on RSO, appointed Bill Oakes music coordinator.

Crucially, Stigwood provided John Travolta to star, and, at Travolta's request, brought Randal Kleiser on board as director. Thirty-one-year-old Kleiser had directed RSO telemovies, and, importantly to Travolta, directed him in *The Boy in the Bubble*. Kleiser would later direct the 1980 Brooke Shields hit *Blue Lagoon*.

Standing back, Stigwood then let production partner Allan Carr run the \$6 million *Grease* movie show. It was Carr who chose twenty-nine-year-old Australian singer Olivia Newton-John to play teenager Sandy opposite Travolta's Danny Zuko, changing Sandy's stage-show nationality of American to Australian for the film. Singing ability was key to this movie, for, unlike *Saturday Night Fever*, *Grease*'s numbers were sung by the cast.

Newton-John was hesitant at first. She had seen *Grease* on stage seven years before, never imagining she might one day play its heroine. Despite having notched up worldwide pop and country hits, and Grammys, she had doubts about her ability to carry the film's lead. Plus, she was six years older than Travolta. To help her decide, she asked for a screen test with Travolta. They did the drive-in scene for the test, and the pair clicked. With Travolta encouraging her, Newton-John signed on.

Newton-John's Australian composer/producer John Farrar was commissioned to write additional tracks. 'Hopelessly Devoted to You' and 'You're the One That I Want', which would both become huge RSO hits, were Farrar compositions. Carr also hired cinematographer buddy Bill Butler, who'd helped sell the project to Stigwood, and, as the movie's choreographer, Patricia Birch, who'd won a Tony for choreographing *Grease* on Broadway. With the cast staying in character on set even when the camera wasn't rolling, the shoot was, according to Carr, 'A big party from the very first day.'

While Carr was having fun with *Grease*, Stigwood pressed on with *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Impressed by *New York Times* music critiques written by Henry Edwards, Stigwood commissioned him to write a screenplay linking his twenty-nine Beatles songs. Screenwriting novice Edwards proceeded to write an inane plot in which a villain steals the instruments of Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, after which the heroes strive to get them back. If this were a Wiggles movie aimed at five-year-olds, it might have made sense. But this was a production for adult music fans, using song lyrics containing frequent drug references.

Stigwood chose the Bee Gees and singing star of the moment Peter Frampton as the film's heroes. The Bee Gees were excited at first; Stigwood was making good on his promise to make them movie stars. But when they read the script, they balked, and tried to back out. Stigwood talked them into staying, on the basis that the international screen exposure would be good for them. But the Gibb never believed in the project, and once the cameras started rolling, it showed. They had their own name for the film: 'Robert's Follies'.

As the villain of the piece, Stigwood cast longtime client Frankie Howerd. Predictably, he also gave Paul Nicholas a supporting role. Veteran American actor George Burns had the only speaking part, as narrator. Guest artists from Billy Preston to comedian Steve Martin to Aerosmith performed individual tracks. To Stigwood's mind, this concoction based on the same formula as *Tommy*, with the bonus of Beatles' music, had even more chance of success.

Stigwood even hired George Martin to orchestrate the film's numbers, which he'd originally produced for the Beatles. Ron Stigwood was his uncle's liaison man with Martin. Sitting in the studio with Martin for weeks, Ron was frequently bored stiff. Only years later did he appreciate that he'd

briefly worked with the man history came to call the fifth Beatle. Through this period, too, Ron's father, Bill, came to visit several times, staying at Stigwood's LA house. Grandfather Gordon came on one occasion too.

'Take Grandad out for lunch,' the frantically busy Stigwood instructed Ron, who took Gordon to the best French restaurant in the San Fernando Valley. Gordon, now balding, portly and slow on his feet, proceeded to fall asleep at the table.

To direct *Sgt. Pepper's*, Stigwood had initially signed Australian-born Chris Beard, co-creator of TV's *The Gong Show*. When Beard wanted to drastically change Edwards' script, Stigwood fired him and hired Michael Schultz, giving him a budget of \$6 million, the largest movie budget ever entrusted to a black director to that time. '*Sgt. Pepper's* was my chance to prove that black directors could handle non-black material,' Schultz later said.

For the final scene, Stigwood wanted to emulate the cover of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's* album, with its eclectic collection of celebrities. At the studio lot where the movie was filmed, Stigwood joined scores of celebs miming the title song to camera. For the scene, he even flew in overseas friends and clients ranging from Barry Humphries, in Dame Edna Everage guise, to Barbara Dickson and Ginger Baker. At the height of Eric Clapton's drug addiction, Baker had fallen out with Stigwood, one day turning up at the Old Barn with a gun. This trans-Atlantic peace offering reunited the pair.

*

Paramount was pressing Stigwood for the third Travolta film under RSO's three-picture deal with the star. When Stigwood sat down to discuss the project with Travolta, he refused to do another musical, demanding a drama. Plus, Travolta demanded comedian Lily Tomlin as his co-star, having been a Tomlin fan for years.

Stigwood acquiesced and signed Tomlin, who specified that her partner Jane Wagner write and direct. He didn't like the script Wagner came up with, a love story called *Moment by Moment* featuring a young beach-bum and an older woman, complete with a love scene in a hot-tub. 'But everyone wore me down,' Stigwood would complain after the event. He let Wagner run with it.

As shooting got underway at Malibu in April, Stigwood left Kevin McCormick in charge. Two weeks later, a fraught McCormick called Stigwood. Wagner had lost control of the shoot. There was absolutely no chemistry between Travolta and Tomlin, and, after arguing repeatedly, the pair had locked themselves in their trailers. Stigwood hurried to the shoot and went from trailer to trailer trying, unsuccessfully, to make peace. In the end, he shut down production for three weeks, bringing in *Saturday Night Fever* cinematographer Ralf Bode as ‘creative consultant’ to try to salvage the film. Under Bode, shooting resumed, and would continue through to July.

Following the June 1978 Hollywood premiere of *Grease*, Stigwood jetted to London for the theatrical premiere of *Evita*. The previous year, he’d convinced Bernard Delfont to refurbish his Casino Cinema on Old Compton Street for the musical. It reopened for *Evita* in its original guise as the Prince Edward Theatre. Despite the *Jeeves* debacle, and to the surprise of some, including Tim Rice, Stigwood had retained Bob Swash as head of RSO’s theatre division, entrusting *Evita* to him. This time, Swash had been very visible at rehearsals, personally signing off on every expense.

Director Hal Prince gave Lloyd Webber what he wanted, a dynamic *Evita* starring Elaine Paige, David Essex and Joss Ackland. After the triumphant first night, Stigwood hosted an after party for eight hundred aboard the paddle-steamer *Tattershall Castle*, moored off the Victoria Embankment, with Dustin Hoffman a special guest. As usual, Stigwood partied like a teenager. ‘Robert had the constitution of an ox on steroids,’ Tim Rice admiringly observed.

Encouraging early reviews launched *Evita* into a run that would last into 1986, with over 3000 performances. In September 1979, RSO would open Hal Prince’s production in New York’s Broadway Theatre with Patti LuPone, Mandy Patinkin and Bob Gunton, for an almost four-year run that would garner seven Tonys and a New York Drama Critics, Circle Award.

Stigwood was back in Los Angeles for the 21 July premiere at Grauman’s Theatre of *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, with Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr in attendance. McCartney had long harboured doubts about

filming *Sgt. Pepper's*, in March telling *Rolling Stone* interviewer Paul Gambaccini, 'From what I've heard of the Stigwood thing, it doesn't seem to have captured it.' Once the film came out, critics agreed. 'A business deal set to music,' declared Janet Maslin in the *New York Times*. The movie would take \$20 million at the box office, but while RSO made much of its money back, Stigwood lost credibility. 'Robert was anaesthetised by his success,' Freddie Gershon would tell *Vanity Fair*. 'He had golden ears, but he wasn't listening.'

This forgettable outing demonstrated that Stigwood didn't have the Midas touch after all. He'd miscalculated by casting the Bee Gees singing Beatles songs. To many Beatles fans, it was sacrilege. This miscalculation killed director Schultz's career for a decade, and the Bee Gees would never do another movie. Stigwood shrugged off the criticism, because *Grease* was conquering the world. Released four weeks before *Sgt. Pepper's*, *Grease* would go on to gross close to \$400 million, with the soundtrack album coming in as number 2 for the year behind *Saturday Night Fever* in the US charts, before eventually becoming, and remaining, the biggest-selling soundtrack of all time.

As the cash rolled in, Stigwood let Beryl Vertue back into the television production arena with a fistful of dollars. This time it was with *Charleston*, a telemovie set in South Carolina, with a Southern belle trying to save her estate following the Civil War. *Charleston* would air on NBC in January 1979. Like the Southern cause, *Charleston* would prove a sore disappointment to its proponents.

Whilst the failure of *Charleston* went almost unnoticed, the next Travolta movie was guaranteed to receive maximum attention. Not even the success of *Grease* could save Stigwood, Travolta or Lily Tomlin from the savaging box-office flop *Moment by Moment* received on its December release. Travolta, who'd just lost his mother to cancer, took the criticism hard. Tomlin declared she might have a breakdown. Stigwood ploughed on regardless. After all, this year, RSO, a company with just sixty permanent employees, turned over half a billion dollars and returned a profit of \$75 million.

Teaming up with David Frost, Stigwood donated his time, and that of RSO staff and clients, as he pulled together a televised new year charity concert at the United Nations in New York. Heralding the International Year of the Child, and with the bill including the Bee Gees, Andy Gibb, ABBA,

Elton John, Olivia Newton-John and Rod Stewart, the concert's ticket and TV rights sales were touted as potentially raising \$100 million for the United Nations Children's Fund. According to Olivia Newton-John today, the benefit actually raised \$10 million, still a healthy contribution to UNICEF.

Once Stigwood had basked in the glory of the 9 January event, he went shopping.

24.

A Racehorse, a Yacht, an Island

‘It’s only a lubricant to make our lives go smoothly.’

Robert Stigwood

FOR A MAN who gambled as much as Stigwood, owning a racehorse seemed a natural next step when he purchased English steeplechaser Artistic Prince, an eight-year-old gelding and former flat racer that ran its first jump races in 1979. One associate would remark that Stigwood by this time considered himself an artistic prince.

As his trainer, Stigwood chose Jenny Pitman, who entered Artistic Prince in the 1979 Grand National. Taking a box at the Aintree racecourse outside Liverpool, Stigwood appeared at the event on the last day of March with blonde actress Susan George on his arm. A host of other guests joined them in Stigwood’s box to watch his horse run the big race, with his jockey resplendent in the sparkling new Stigwood racing colours: brown vest, orange striped sleeves and orange cap.

Prior to the big race, Stigwood and his guests were enjoying lunch and consuming large quantities of champagne when George was called away to take an urgent telephone call. She returned flushed with excitement. Bob Hope had asked her to come to London at once to film a TV special. Making her apologies to Stigwood, she rushed away, and never did learn how Artistic Prince fared. She didn’t miss anything. Of the thirty-four starters, Artistic Prince was one of twenty-seven horses that failed to finish, falling at the twenty-ninth hurdle.

Twice more, in 1982 and 1983, Artistic Prince would run in the Grand National in Stigwood’s colours. It failed to finish on both occasions, falling at the very first obstacle in 1982. For the 1983 race, Stigwood wouldn’t even bother attending. RSO’s UK chief Rod Gunner hosted the guests in Stigwood’s box that year, among them trainer Jenny Pitman, who also had

another runner, Corbiere, in the race. Corbiere proceeded to win, making Pitman the first female trainer of a Grand National winner. Stigwood got the message. A player who knew when to fold, he sold Artistic Prince.

The cost of the racehorse episode was a drop in Stigwood's now very deep bucket. He confessed to nephew Ron that the scope of his financial success surprised even him. Money was merely a means to a very pleasant end. As he told business partner Freddie Gershon, now also flush with RSO cash, 'Darling, it's only a lubricant to make our lives go smoothly. Enjoy it.'

Stigwood made several more self-indulgent purchases in 1979. Increasingly, he had been chartering aircraft or hitching rides on the Gulfstream IV of Bermudian business-woman Mary Jean Green, daughter of Sir Harold Mitchell, one of the world's richest men. Stigwood seriously considered buying a corporate aircraft, even looking into purchasing Elvis Presley's former jet. Instead, he bought a boat. But not just any boat.

From his brother, Stigwood had learned that Bill and their now retired father had jointly purchased a small motor-boat, which for most of the time sat on a trailer in Gordon's Adelaide drive. Bill told Robert that he and Gordon attended trade shows after which Gordon came away with ideas for boating gadgets that he would expertly recreate in his garage. Stigwood would show them what sort of boat someone with his money and style could buy.

While at Antibes on the French Riviera, he spotted an elegant private yacht in the marina. The eighty-five metre *Sarina* had been built as a private yacht by the Krupp works at Kiel, Germany in 1929, and had led an interesting life, even serving as US Navy patrol vessel USS *Argus* during World War Two. For the past decade, she'd been owned by British millionaire MP Lord Guinness. Now in poor health, Guinness rarely ventured aboard, and Stigwood persuaded him to let him take the craft off his hands.

The Australian proceeded to lavish millions of dollars on a refurbishment that included restoration of *Sarina*'s original clipper bow, and installation of a GPS navigation system accurate to 1.5 metres and whose satellite dish was hidden beneath the false second funnel he added. He had the yacht furnished like a country house afloat, complete with a grand piano bolted to the deck of the main salon. Part of *Sarina*'s charm was her age, but that made her an inefficient ship, requiring a permanent crew of twenty-eight, who in turn occupied significant space. As Stigwood told one

visitor: 'We're a little short of staterooms for guests and can sleep only ten or twelve.'

Former theatrical partner Michael White would complain that Stigwood never invited him to sail with him. He was not alone. While nephew Ron did visit *Sarina* when she was in port, he never sailed on her, or her successor *Jezebel*. Stigwood would use his yachts for commuting from Bermuda to New York, London and the playgrounds of the Caribbean and Mediterranean minus the terrors of flying, in a way that secured business guests' undivided attention.

When Stigwood attended the Broadway premiere of *Evita* on 25 September, one of his opening night guests was *Bugsy Malone* director Alan Parker. David Land told Stigwood that, back when the *Evita* album was released, Parker had expressed interest in directing *Evita* onscreen. Parker, in New York directing the movie *Fame*, whose soundtrack would be released by RSO, came along to *Evita* and thoroughly enjoyed it, as he told Stigwood at the after party.

'Would you like to make a film of *Evita*?' Stigwood asked.

'I'll give you my answer when I've finished *Fame*,' replied Parker, whose long shoot was severely testing him.

Late that year, shortly after taking delivery of the refurbished *Sarina*, Stigwood was taking her for a spin around the Caribbean when he lifted the ship's radio telephone and called a hotel on St Maarten, the Dutch half of an Eastern Caribbean island. RSO Records had told him that Alan Parker was there, resting after *Fame* had wrapped in Manhattan.

'I'm steaming towards St Maarten,' Stigwood told Parker, inviting him to join him aboard. The following day, with *Sarina* anchored off Philipsburg, St Maarten's little capital, Stigwood gave Parker a sumptuous lunch aboard, then asked, 'Want to play tennis?'

Tennis racquets were produced, and Stigwood and Parker were whisked ashore in *Sarina*'s runabout. With the craft speeding back to the yacht, the two men, racquets in hand, came to a tennis court, only to find it locked. As they trudged away along a dusty street, Stigwood posed a question.

'So, are you going to make *Evita*, or not?'

'Robert, after *Fame*, I don't want to make back-to-back musicals,' Parker wearily returned. 'So, the answer is no.'

Stigwood said nothing for a time as they continued walking. Then, he lifted his racquet and began beating Parker, who escaped by running back to his hotel. It had not been Stigwood's finest hour as a negotiator.

Back in Manhattan, putting *Evita* on the backburner, Stigwood approved an idea brought to him by Canadian actor Allan Moyle, about two rebellious teenage girls who come to New York City, form a punk rock group, and, presaging Russian band Pussy Riot in recent times, take on the establishment. *Times Square*, directed by Moyle, was slated for 1980 release, with Stigwood assigning Kevin McCormick and Bill Oakes the job of pulling it together.

With a cast of unknowns, offensive characters and a jarring script, *Times Square* proved such a hard sell that McCormick, unable to interest any major studio in distributing it, settled on second-rank Associated Film Distributors. Stigwood, confident the film would break new ground the same way that *Saturday Night Fever* had, expressed complete faith in *Times Square* succeeding.

A twenty-six-acre estate at Bermuda's West End became Stigwood's next big purchase. 'Wreck Hill' took its name from pirates who moved the beacon on the hill to lure ships onto rocks, where they pillaged the wrecks. The estate's Georgian house was dilapidated when Stigwood bought it, and he commenced lengthy and expensive renovations. The house had too few bedrooms for Stigwood's needs, but an historical preservation caveat prevented extensions. He got around this by also building a boathouse, a courtside tennis clubhouse and a poolhouse, all containing additional guest bedrooms.

When Stigwood applied to register *Sarina* with the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club, he was informed he would have to go to the end of a long waiting list. He immediately registered *Sarina* with the Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club, subsequently having 'RHADC' painted on the vessel's stern.

By any assessment, 1979 had been good to Stigwood, with the huge success of *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*, and of *Evita* in the West End and on Broadway. Plus, RSO Records had its best year yet. On top of the phenomenal movie-soundtrack sales, artists including Suzi Quatro, Player and Rick Dees had sold up a storm on red cow label compilations. Onetime

Kingston Trio member John Stewart, who wrote the 1967 Monkees hit 'Daydream Believer', was poached from RCA, and his May 1979 *Bombs Away Dream Babies* album, recorded with Fleetwood Mac's Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks, sold a million copies for RSO. A single from the album, 'Gold', went to number 5 on *Billboard*. To cap the year, that December John Williams recorded the London Symphony Orchestra performing his *Empire Strikes Back* soundtrack for release as an RSO double album in May 1980, five days before the movie's premiere. It would go platinum.

RSO Records would have had even greater success had its London executive Alexander Sinclair not turned down an Irish band that May. After Dublin youngster Paul Hewson sent RSO demo tapes, Sinclair responded with a standard rejection letter. Hewson would become better known as Bono. His band was U2. Stigwood, now almost entirely focused on film, is unlikely to have personally heard the tapes. His loss became old partner/rival Chris Blackwell's gain; Blackwell signed U2 to Island Records in the new year.

By the end of 1979, too, RSO Records failed to take up the Sherbet/Highway options. After waiting eighteen months and reportedly consuming \$200,000 of their own money leading a rock-star lifestyle in LA, the band, now broke, returned to Australia, tails between legs. Today, lead singer Daryl Braithwaite is tight-lipped about exactly what transpired. Back then, he said: 'We blew it!'

Stigwood, meanwhile, experienced two 1979 hiccups that he took very personally. Andy Gibb, now hooked on cocaine, separated from his pregnant wife, and, utterly unreliable and unresponsive to Stigwood's attempts at guidance, was dumped from the RSO roster, to Stigwood's great regret: 'It broke my heart.' Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice then broke his heart anew; when their RSO contract came up for renewal that May, they failed to re-sign.

Lloyd Webber opted out of working with both Stigwood and Rice. He was grateful to Stigwood for teaching him the ropes, but, founding his own management company, in the new year he would team up with fledgling producer Cameron Mackintosh to stage *Cats*, a musical based on the poems of T. S. Eliot that required no input from a lyricist. Lloyd Webber and Mackintosh would also later do *The Phantom of the Opera* together.

Lloyd Webber would reveal: 'I told Cameron that we really should take a leaf out of what Robert Stigwood had told me. He said the key to a successful show was to replicate it quickly, and exactly, in other places.'

Still, Stigwood retained the grand rights to *Superstar*, *Joseph* and *Evita*, and there was every reason for him to expect 1980 to be another bumper year.

25.

A Year of Love and War

‘The sun rarely sets on Stigwood.’

Rolling Stone

IN 1979, US-BASED Australian-born media magnate Rupert Murdoch purchased Sydney’s Channel Ten. Murdoch appointed the channel’s smart young station manager, lawyer Martin Cooper, News Corp’s general manager corporate affairs, with two key responsibilities – acquisition for News Corp of the other TV stations around Australia that subsequently joined the Sydney station in the creation of Network Ten, and development of Cooper’s proposal to create a film production entity in Australia.

This was prior to the Australian Government film investment incentive scheme known as 10BA, but a time when Australia was producing outstanding young movie directors including Bruce Beresford, Fred Schepisi, Gillian Armstrong and Peter Weir. Cooper’s idea was to create product for the international market and to supply Ten. Murdoch liked the idea, but felt the need for a film industry partner.

Late in the year, Murdoch and Robert Stigwood dined together. On the rare occasions that Stigwood was in New York these days, fellow Australians were frequently among his dinner companions, among them Australia’s then foreign minister Andrew Peacock and even Catholic priests from Adelaide, Stigwood’s former teachers at Sacred Heart. As Murdoch and Stigwood dined, the media magnate revealed he was looking for a partner to make Australian films via a jointly-funded \$5 million production fund.

‘Are you interested, Robert?’ Murdoch asked.

According to insiders, Stigwood was both impressed and daunted by Murdoch, feeling out of his depth in his presence – a self-made man from a working-class background versus a man who’d inherited the foundations of

his empire and grown up surrounded by wealth. Knowing that Murdoch frowned on heavy drinking, Stigwood even refrained from his usual conspicuous consumption in his presence. Their meetings were businesslike and comparatively humourless.

Stigwood was enthusiastic from the get-go about partnering with Murdoch, but hesitant to rush into the proposed Australian film production arm. He already had numerous movies on the go in the US. *Times Square* was due for release in the autumn of 1980. Norman Wexler had written a script for a *Saturday Night Fever* sequel. Paramount was pushing for a *Grease* sequel, with Barry Diller in fact wanting three sequels and a TV series spin-off. Plus, Stigwood was adapting a 1978 Bob Randall book, *The Fan*, hoping to attract Lauren Bacall to star. On top of all this, he'd committed to taking Hal Prince's staging of Stephen Sondheim's hit Broadway musical *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street* to the West End in the summer of 1980.

Stigwood suggested that, before either of them parted with any money, he and Murdoch employ a Hollywood expert to suss out film opportunities in Australia. Murdoch agreed, and Stigwood hired Francis O'Brien, a flamboyant thirty-six-year-old Ohio native and former Congressional aide who until recently had been vice-president of marketing at Paramount, where he'd handled the launches of *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*. 'Go see if there's a film industry there,' Stigwood told O'Brien.

O'Brien spent months in Sydney watching local movies and meeting a dozen Australian directors. According to O'Brien, he initiated what followed. According to others, it was Martin Cooper. Either way, a classic Australian movie would be the result.

In the last week of April 1980, Stigwood flew into Sydney on his way to the Australian opening of *Evita* at the Adelaide Festival. A year earlier, Adelaide Festival Centre Trust general manager Kevin Earle had cornered Stigwood in London and convinced him to let the Trust launch *Evita* in Australia. When Stigwood required an AU\$850,000 guarantee, the Trust had bravely agreed. Young West Australian entrepreneur Michael Edgley had subsequently signed on to take the show to Perth, Melbourne and Sydney.

Stigwood's flight into Sydney arrived late, meaning Stigwood and his seven-member entourage missed their Adelaide connection, last flight of the night, leaving them stranded. Having flown from Bermuda via New York and Los Angeles, even Stigwood was exhausted, and, flopping into the airport's VIP lounge, he called for an aircraft to be chartered at once. To escape Sydney to arrive in good time to get in a night's sleep before presiding over an *Evita* preview the following evening, a Trans Australia Airlines DC-9 with six crew members was chartered. It left at the crack of dawn.

The Australian press gleefully reported that the charter, for eight passengers, cost AU\$12,000. When Stigwood landed in Adelaide, he marched across the tarmac with male staffers trailing behind and Gini Smythe at his side.

By this stage, Gini, previously Stigwood's London PA, had become his executive assistant in the US. In 1978, she'd called Stigwood from London. 'I rather pathetically said "I want to come to the States" and Robert said "Fine",' she recalls today. Taking an apartment in Los Angeles, she worked as Stigwood's West Coast PA for nine months. 'Through the crazy making of *Sgt. Pepper's* and the hideous *Moment by Moment*,' she says. Then Joy McMillan departed, and Gini was promoted to Stigwood's executive assistant, thereafter living and travelling with him wherever he went in the world.

In addition to having pretty blonde Gini at his side to convey the impression he was a red-blooded heterosexual Aussie male, when Stigwood arrived in Adelaide he told the waiting press, 'It's beaut to be home, and I want a bloody cold beer.' One Stigwood associate would remark he doubted Stigwood ever drank beer in his life. For decades, he drank J&B whisky like water, later acquiring a taste for vodka. And he never lost his taste for the very best French champagne and Chateau Mouton Rothschild.

Along with Lloyd Webber, Murdoch and Hal Prince, Stigwood, in open-neck shirt and gold neck-chain, attended *Evita's* Adelaide premiere on 30 April, escorting his mother. To Gwen's delight, Stigwood had created a new Australian company to administer *Evita's* Australian run, the Gwen Burrows Organisation. Patti Mostyn managed the publicity. The after party was at the Old Lion Hotel, and as it raged, Adelaide *Advertiser* columnist Basil Arty wandered down to the deserted basement bar, to find the tuxedo-clad Rupert Murdoch alone in a corner.

‘A lot of noise up there,’ said the sombre Murdoch to Arty, inclining his eyes to the ceiling. ‘Great show, though, *Evita*.’

Stigwood partied all night, as did many guests. At 3.30 am, a Stigwood representative put a stop to partygoers charging cigarette purchases to their host. The next morning, Stigwood and fellow guests made their way to the 10.00 a.m. official reception at Adelaide Town Hall, straight from the party. As *Rolling Stone* magazine had said three years earlier, ‘The sun rarely sets on Stigwood.’ *Evita* was a huge hit in Adelaide. The Adelaide Festival Trust made a million-dollar profit from its share of the takings, funding new productions for years to come.

Just days after *Evita*’s Adelaide opening, Stigwood and Murdoch were in Sydney attending a dinner at the Hilton, where Murdoch announced that he and Stigwood were launching Associated R&R Films Pty Limited to make Aussie movies. Associated R&R’s board would include Martin Cooper, News Corp Australia’s Ken Cowley and another director representing Murdoch, and several Stigwood representatives including Ross Barlow, chief of Polygram Australia. Francis O’Brien would be chief executive officer and Martin Cooper chief production executive – one representative from each partner’s camp. The joint venture announcement made headlines across Australia.

Following the dinner, at Martin Cooper’s instigation director Peter Weir and Australian producer Patricia Lovell met with Stigwood and Murdoch. Lovell had independently sent Murdoch Weir’s draft script for *Gallipoli*, a First World War drama, and this had ended up in Cooper’s hands. Lovell, who’d produced Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, felt certain Murdoch would be interested in the project because his father, Keith, had been a war correspondent during the Gallipoli campaign who had exposed gross mismanagement by senior commanders at the time.

Murdoch and Stigwood agreed to back the movie to a maximum of \$3 million, more than three times the budget of any previous Australian feature. While many writers would subsequently assume that Murdoch’s decision to make *Gallipoli* was influenced by a desire to honour his father, sources close to Murdoch state categorically that this was untrue. It was purely a business decision, they say.

Stigwood now had to stump up his \$2.5 million for Associated R&R’s production fund. The problem was that RSO was having a cash-flow crisis. On top of his shopping spree the previous year, Stigwood was pouring tens

of millions into *The Fan*, *Evita* and *Staying Alive*. So, he went to Ross Barlow at Polygram Australia, and, as a member of Polygram's international board, convinced Barlow to loan Associated R&R \$2.5 million against future RSO Records earnings in Australia, to be paid in stages.

As 1980 continued to unfold, it increasingly became an *annus horribilis* for Stigwood. When Eric Clapton's contract came up for renewal, his personal manager Roger Forrester left RSO and took Clapton with him. Clapton has never explained why he ditched Stigwood. To cover his pain, Stigwood later said, 'I let him go.'

By far the biggest blow of 1980 came when the Bee Gees sued RSO for \$120 million for claimed underpayments. Stigwood was stunned. He'd made the Gibb brothers international stars, and had helped all three through marriage break-ups. Stigwood was even godfather to their children. Blaming the legal action on a 'mad, bad attorney' retained by the brothers, Stigwood counter-sued for \$310 million. Jumping on the litigation bandwagon, Barbara Dickson, another Stigwood favourite, also sued him.

In the space of twelve months, all three of his bedrock acts, the Bee Gees, Clapton and Lloyd Webber and Rice had deserted Stigwood. Feeling betrayed by those he loved, he went back to Bermuda, boarded *Sarina*, and sailed away.

When *Sarina* docked at the Greek island of Corfu, Stigwood climbed into the back of a limousine for the short drive to the island's casino. As the limo cruised along, he was soon in conversation with its driver, Patrick Bywalski. Twenty-five-year-old Patrick was French. Handsome, with a solid jaw, thick hair, olive skin, and, as Stigwood learned when he later saw him stripped down, a fine tanned physique and thickly hairy chest, Patrick was also charming. His poor, heavily accented English added to his sex appeal.

Falling head over heels for Patrick, Stigwood decided he was going to turn him into a movie star, a French John Travolta, and offered to fly him to Hollywood at once for a screen test. Patrick was happy to agree, but, he said, he would need to consult his wife. Patrick was married to Brigitte, a cute little French blonde with large, doe-like eyes. Stigwood told Patrick to bring Brigitte along. So, Patrick and Brigitte were flown to Los Angeles, where, on Stigwood's instructions, his nephew Ron handled the screen test.

Before Patrick went in front of a camera, Richard Eastman took the Frenchman under his wing to try to improve his English. Nonetheless, when the screen test came around, Patrick failed to impress.

‘We should be testing Brigitte,’ a member of the crew remarked behind Patrick’s back. ‘She’s more talented.’

When Stigwood was informed that Patrick couldn’t act, sing or dance, he promptly offered him a job, as his personal assistant and travelling companion. And Patrick accepted. Like Gini Smythe, Patrick Bywalski became glued to Stigwood. Unlike Gini, he would stay with him for the rest of Stigwood’s days.

Brigitte accepted that, like a sailor, her husband would now spend much of the year away from her. In fact, she encouraged him to take the job. Brigitte was set up in an apartment in Nice on the French Riviera. There, she would raise three sons, all with very Anglo names: Gregory, Daniel and David. Ostensibly for taxation purposes, Patrick retained French citizenship, with the Nice apartment his official home address. He would visit Brigitte from time to time, and occasionally Stigwood would fly her to join the pair wherever he and Patrick were in the world, for a holiday.

Later, when the Bywalski boys appeared on the scene, they would accompany their mother on excursions to visit father Patrick and ‘Uncle Robert’. This odd relationship was accepted as normal by Stigwood’s closest staff members. ‘Patrick and his family were and are loved by everyone around Robert,’ says Gini Smythe today. ‘I am super fond of Patrick and Brigitte, even though I rarely get to see them.’

Outside Stigwood’s inner circle, no one knew how especially fond he was of Patrick. Among family members, only Ron was in on the secret. And with Stigwood forbidding male friends to be photographed in his company, the public never knew. Many in the media were aware that Stigwood was gay; the British press described him as ‘a confirmed bachelor’, the stock euphemism for a homosexual.

But Stigwood very carefully and deliberately kept the love of his life out of the public eye. Like friend Frankie Howerd, he would keep up the pretence of being straight till the day he died. Attending premieres, he always had a woman on his arm: these days, his mother, or Gini Smythe. Some members of the Australian press would even describe Gini as Stigwood’s girlfriend.

To keep faith with Murdoch, Stigwood was determined to pull the *Gallipoli* deal together, but there were early complications. Firstly, Weir's script and a subsequent treatment were owned by the South Australian Film Corporation, with an option held by producer Pat Lovell. As 'Miss Pat', Lovell had started out hosting ABC-TV children's show *Mr Squiggle*. Since producing *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, she had laboured for a year trying to get *Gallipoli* up.

Lovell was brought into the Associated R&R tent, although she heard that some were calling for her to be dumped from the project. She also heard that RSO executives from London had boasted at the Cannes Film Festival in May that Stigwood was going to make Weir's *Gallipoli*. Irritated by apparently being taken for granted, Lovell angrily reminded Francis O'Brien that Stigwood didn't yet have the rights to the script – she did. O'Brien quickly invited her to the US to meet with his boss and finalise the project.

After flying at her own expense to New York, Lovell was met by O'Brien, and together they flew on to Bermuda. There, they boarded *Sarina*. Just back from the Mediterranean, the handsome craft sat tied up at the foot of Hamilton's Front Street. After Lovell was conducted to a stateroom complete with fresh flowers, Stigwood greeted her warmly in the salon, then hosted her for lunch. They then transferred to a sleek Italian-built Riva wooden runabout.

Powered by twin inboard engines, the Riva sped the pair across the turquoise bay to the Wreck Hill isthmus. Little did Lovell know that the Riva had the annoying habit of flooding and sinking. Often, underwater explorer Teddy Tucker, a Stigwood neighbour, had to come by with his cruiser to winch the Riva from the seafloor. Still, as he did with underperforming executives, Stigwood stuck with the Riva. At the Wreck Hill jetty, Stigwood and Lovell clambered ashore.

Seeing a charming white building, Lovell remarked, 'What a lovely house.'

Stigwood laughed. 'That's the boathouse. The main house is up on the rise.' Sliding into a golf buggy at the boathouse, the pair trundled past the new tennis clubhouse and poolhouse. The original two-storey mansion was a chaotic building site littered with construction material as Stigwood proudly gave Lovell a guided tour. Taking her arm, he guided her over and

around obstacles. ‘Can’t have our liaison starting with litigation resulting from personal injury,’ he joked.

They ended up on one of the estate’s two beaches, where he and Freddie Gershon sometimes lunched to make major business decisions. Here, the pair discussed *Gallipoli*. ‘Pat, I trust Peter Weir and yourself completely,’ said Stigwood, at his charming best, ‘and I know we can make a film of which I can be proud.’

There on the beach, they shook hands, with lawyers for both sides to subsequently iron out the details. ‘I will always respect and admire him immensely for having the courage to let us run,’ said Lovell fifteen years later. As she was jumping into the Riva for the return to *Sarina*, she twisted her ankle, which she hid from Stigwood. After dinner aboard the yacht, Stigwood announced they were off to a disco just along Front Street, generating a grimace from Lovell.

Years before, local Terry Brannon had set up the Forty Thieves nightclub, Hamilton’s top nightspot. Since the disco boom, Brannon’s son Tony had convinced him to turn it into Disco 40, in which Stigwood had taken a financial interest, and it became *de rigueur* for Stigwood guests to visit the disco. Lovell was the exception. Producing her painfully swollen ankle, she received sympathy from her host and medical attention from *Sarina*’s crew. She was delivered to her departing flight the next day in a wheelchair.

Martin Cooper flew to New York from Sydney to sort out the legals and get *Gallipoli* off the ground. He worked from RSO’s plush offices, furnished and decorated at great expense. CEO Freddie Gershon’s own office featured exquisite French antiques. His executive PA was now James Daley, who’d relocated to the Big Apple from LA. For Cooper’s stay, the accommodating Gershon cleared the office of an RSO executive.

With Associated R&R’s CEO, Francis O’Brien, based in New York, back in Sydney Cooper set up a small Associated R&R office on the thirteenth floor at 100 William Street, installing former agent Ben Gannon as full-time general manager, and a secretary. Accounting would be handled by News Ltd. Cooper would rarely use his R&R office; Murdoch kept him busy as his in-house attorney on various projects including the 1981 acquisition of *The Times* of London for News Ltd.

On the strength of Stigwood's Wreck Hill handshake, Pat Lovell took an \$85,000 loan and bought the *Gallipoli* rights from the SAFC. Once Cooper finalised contracts, Lovell would onsell the rights to Associated R&R, at cost. Director Weir, strongly influenced by wife Wendy, soon chose his two leads, American-born Mel Gibson, who was winning attention in George Miller's *Mad Max*, and newcomer Mark Lee. Weir sent their screen tests to Stigwood, who frustrated progress by putting off a decision. It took Gini Smythe to press her boss for Gibson and Lee to be approved.

To improve Weir's screenplay, Lovell and Weir brought on board noted Australian playwright David Williamson. At that point the script made the two male leads brothers who fought at the Battle of Lone Pine, inspired by World War One memorials Weir had seen in Australian country towns, where numerous members of the same family were listed.

Williamson changed *Gallipoli*'s brothers into best friends, and sportsmen. Mateship and sport, two strong Australian themes, would give the film its essence. Williamson also gave the dialogue a thorough polish. His final script, enhanced by authentic historical background from academic historian Bill Gammage, would culminate in the slaughterhouse that was the 1915 Battle of the Nek.

At the end of June, Associated R&R announced that it would be producing *Gallipoli* as part of a three-picture annual slate costing AU\$10 million. *Gallipoli*'s announced budget, AU\$2.5 million, would rise to AU\$2.8 million, in great part to take in Associated R&R's 1980–81 operating costs. Stigwood and Murdoch agreed that receipts from *Gallipoli* and succeeding films would be reinvested in Associated R&R.

Some commentators over the years have said that the partners' intent was to take advantage of Australian government financial incentives for film-making, but government incentives were never a part of the business plan of Associated R&R, and the company never applied for or received any government assistance.

Murdoch emphasised that, to him, this was all about business. 'We believe the key element which has limited the industry's growth into substantial worldwide recognition and success has been the absence of substantial sums of entrepreneurial risk capital.' Stigwood added that their objective was to establish Australia 'as a major international production centre'.

In search of a distributor, Francis O'Brien began shopping Williamson's *Gallipoli* treatment around the US studios. He was to say that three quite liked it. One asked for a romance to be added. Another wanted a happy ending. Only Paramount was prepared to release it as it stood. To some Stigwood associates it was never in doubt that *Gallipoli* would end up at Paramount – Stigwood had become a close friend of Charlie Bluhdorn, chairman of Gulf and Western, owners of Paramount.

With Williamson working up the shooting script, Weir and Lovell pushed towards a September shoot, and Stigwood went sailing with Patrick. Most of the film would be shot on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula, where Anzac Cove was recreated at Coffin Bay. Filming would culminate in a five-day Cairo shoot in November, at the foot of the Pyramids, for which Stigwood would sail to Egypt. Meantime, Stigwood seconded Gini Smythe to *Gallipoli* to liaise with the production team and keep his often over-exuberant executive producer Francis O'Brien on a leash.

According to insiders, it became impossible to get Stigwood to personally make decisions about *Gallipoli*. Some found him incoherent from early afternoon after boozy lunches. It was Gini Smythe who kept the wheels turning, even though she would only be credited as assistant to the producer. 'Gini was really running things,' one executive associated with the film declares. Says Gini today, '*Gallipoli* was and still is my favourite of all our movies, and the one I am proud to have my name on.'

At the beginning of July, when Stigwood was in London for his West End *Sweeney Todd* opening, he was talking about producing a 'Son of *Grease*' movie starring Olivia Newton-John and Andy Gibb.

Ron Stigwood returned to Australia to work on *Gallipoli* as supervisor of extras. According to Pat Lovell, at one point some members of Associated R&R's board expressed concerns to her about the potential for overages on extras costs. Those concerns dissolved when Lovell informed the board that Stigwood's eminently trustworthy nephew was running the extras department. To save money, Ron even donned uniform and played a Turkish machine-gunner during a battle scene. 'Traitor!' quipped an Australian associate.

Pat Lovell seemed daunted by Stigwood, and obsessed with proving that a female producer could bring a big film in on budget. She was never

aware that Stigwood's budget share was coming out of Polygram Australia. Associated R&R, meanwhile, found that extracting payments from Stigwood's financiers Polygram was never easy; sometimes late, they came with demands for an immediate receipt.

At one point during production, Peter Weir decided he needed to soften the film with the introduction of a female element, by shooting a Cairo ball scene in the grand lobby of Adelaide railway station. Weir received approval from Associated R&R to go over budget for the additional scene, but Lovell fretted about the six-figure budget increase, until reminded that Stigwood had called her prior to filming to say that there was room for additional spending if Weir absolutely needed it, as long as the total budget came in under AU\$3 million.

In November, *Sarina* sailed majestically into Alexandria, her home port when owned by Egyptian cotton millionaire Maurice Ada, who named her. The yacht had brought Stigwood and his personal entourage to witness *Gallipoli*'s Egyptian shoot. Stigwood, determined to forget his latest loss-making exercises, came to play.

Times Square had opened in the US in October to scathing reviews and woeful box-office returns. The strange little film struggled to gross more than a million dollars. Then, on 15 November, Stigwood terminated *Sweeney Todd*'s run at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane after just eighty-five unprofitable performances. Following the lead of Napoleon Bonaparte, who drank champagne in both victory and defeat, Stigwood, who drank a minimum of a bottle a day, opened another bottle of bubbly and staged another party.

'Egypt was a blast!' says Gini Smythe. 'Our hotel was right by the pyramids.' This was the Mena House. Stigwood's Montgomery Suite had a large patio overlooking the pyramids, where he hosted a wrap party after shooting concluded. Meals were taken in the hotel's basement Indian restaurant, the only eatery with reliable food. 'A whole bunch of us would gather for dinner, eat, rehash the day, and laugh,' says Gini.

David Williamson had written a scene where Australian troops play 'football' at the foot of the pyramids. When Weir prepared to film it as a rugby league game, the film's noted DOP Russell Boyd, who'd shot *Picnic*, and camera operator John Seale, who would also become a renowned

cinematographer, refused to shoot it that way. Knowing the film's heroes were from West Australian units, they pointed out that those men would have played Australian Rules football. Weir agreed, and Williamson even became one of the footballers. Stigwood, surprising everyone telling them he'd played Aussie Rules at school in Adelaide, also joined in the scene.

From Egypt, Stigwood sailed back to Bermuda to focus on *The Fan*. Paramount had backed the film for spring 1981 release after Stigwood secured Lauren Bacall, James Garner and Maureen Stapleton to star. To direct, he'd hired Ed Bianchi, a TV director and second unit director on *Times Square*. A musical number later described as 'a 1980s camp hoot' was even created for Bacall to sing in a fictional musical, *Never Say Never*, with music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Tim Rice.

This year, the year of 'desertions', was capped for Stigwood when Ron informed him he wanted to go back to Australia. The *Gallipoli* shoot had made his nephew homesick, and Martin Cooper had found him a job as a production assistant on Australian film *Hoodwink*. Besides, Ron had become bored working for his uncle, with long periods when he had nothing to do. Prior to the *Gallipoli* shoot, one of his last tasks had been to find Stigwood a new personal chef in London. Stigwood wished him well, and let him go.

26.

Upping Anchor

‘For Stigwood, if it wasn’t the pinnacle every time, he wasn’t going to stay.’

John Travolta

ONCE FRANCIS O’BRIEN had Peter Weir’s *Gallipoli* edit in his hands in the spring of 1981, he took it to Paramount. For a long time Paramount executives scratched their heads over how to market the film. A publicist came up with the Australasian promotional line, ‘From a legend we’ll always remember, comes a story you’ll never forget,’ which, for the US, became ‘From a place you’ve never heard of, comes a story you’ll never forget.’ Following its world premiere in Sydney in August, *Gallipoli* would open in limited release in North America, with a UK opening in December.

In January, O’Brien had told *New York* magazine that Associated R&R’s next feature would be *Fortress*. Based on a Gabrielle Lord novel about a bush teacher and pupils being taken hostage, it had been optioned by Ben Gannon, and for a time Bruce Beresford was attached to direct. ‘We want to make films that are commercial around the world,’ said O’Brien, ‘but are unique because they’re Australian.’

Meanwhile, Paramount had high hopes of *The Fan* doing big business, especially after the subject of a murderous fan stalking a star had become chillingly real with the slaying of John Lennon outside Manhattan’s Dakota building the previous December. Sadly, once *The Fan* opened on 15 May, it quickly dashed expectations. Bianchi had turned it into a bloody shlock-horror affair which, with Lennon’s death so fresh in the public mind, offended many and entertained few. Lauren Bacall was to say the final gory product bore little resemblance to the script she’d originally signed off on. *The Fan* would gross \$3 million, just a third of its \$9 million budget.

In May, too, Stigwood, acknowledging that RSO Records was struggling without new Bee Gees or Clapton hits, pruned the division’s staff

numbers by 80 per cent. Just a dozen people remained on the red cow label's payroll. Al Coury would also shortly depart as RSO Records chief, with Bill Oakes taking his chair. Setting up Network Records, which would have a massive hit with the *Flashdance* soundtrack, Coury would also take on the management of Irene Cara.

Later in May, it was announced that a settlement had been reached between the Bee Gees and RSO. Freddie Gershon subsequently ruffled Gibb brothers feathers in June by telling *Rolling Stone* they had apologised to Stigwood and dropped their suit. This resulted in them publishing the settlement terms. In essence, they were these: RSO withdrew all its claims. In return, the Bee Gees would deliver two more albums to RSO as per their existing contract, but with an improved royalty and a substantial advance. Stigwood ceased forthwith to be the Bee Gees' manager, and Dick Ashby quit RSO to continue managing them. All rights to Bee Gees music now returned to them, with RSO receiving a small royalty (2 per cent) until 1989. And RSO paid the Bee Gees an undisclosed sum in settlement of their financial claims.

It would eventuate that the comparatively small settlement received by the brothers was eclipsed by the action's legal bill. 'It ended up costing them a fortune,' Stigwood said twenty years later, still embittered. Barry Gibb did apologise to Stigwood, and the pair's old closeness eventually returned.

Like a royal barge, *Sarina* sailed up the Thames in June and tied up in the shadow of Tower Bridge in the heart of London, making a grandiose statement about her Australian owner. When the press came aboard to interview him, Stigwood said he'd come to discuss casting for his next film, *Evita*. From bridge to salon, *Daily Express* photographer Douglas Morrison snapped Stigwood around the ship, as he posed even with Gini Smythe and Brigitte Bywalski. Having flown Brigitte in from France to briefly join husband Patrick aboard, Stigwood smiled warmly for the camera with his arms around the attractive blondes.

Several days later, *Sarina* sailed for the Isle of Wight. There, Stigwood brought Gini's mother aboard. After lunch, he ran an advance print of *Gallipoli* for her. 'It was due to her sobbing all the way through the film,'

says Gini, ‘that I discovered that my grandfather had fought at Gallipoli in the Light Horse, and lived to tell the tale.’

Just weeks later, Stigwood was in the central west of New South Wales, sitting, in suit and tie, in the crowded Harden Country Club as an auctioneer opened the bidding on Redbank, a 6000-acre Harden estate. Crowned by a long, low, white colonial mansion, the property had been home to the Osborne family for 145 years. Stigwood, flying to Australia for the 7 August world premiere of *Gallipoli* at Sydney’s Village Cinemas, had chartered a helicopter and buzzed out to inspect Redbank on the recommendation of Rupert Murdoch. Jumping back into the chopper, he’d flown directly to the auction.

The bidding grew into a battle between Stigwood, top button undone and tie loosened to blend in with the casually dressed ‘cockies’ – the rural elite – and Michael Wills-Allan, of Dunally-Harden, a property contiguous with Redbank. When the hammer came down, Stigwood had won, bidding AU\$2,794,552. The sale would be completed in the name of his Ellsmere Investments company.

After Stigwood accepted a congratulatory handshake from Wills-Allan, he remarked, ‘I thought it was about time I had a farm, a place of my own I could build up and develop. I won’t work forever in show business.’ He added, considerably exaggerating the truth, ‘Mine is an old Australian family anyway. My relatives were all shareholders in the formation of the South Australian Company, which virtually used to run the state. There are still a lot of pastoralists in the family today.’

Just hours later, he was back in Sydney, preparing for *Gallipoli*’s big night accompanied by his mother, who’d flown up from Adelaide, and preparing to tell Murdoch that he’d joined him in owning a slice of rural New South Wales. As it happened, Murdoch didn’t attend the *Gallipoli* premiere; underlings failed to convince him to put in an appearance for PR purposes.

Gallipoli soon opened in New York, Los Angeles, Vancouver and Montreal, despite the theft of a release print in Canada. The UK release later in the year would generate poor British press, with accusations *Gallipoli* was a ‘Pom-bashing’ exercise that blamed the Brits for the Gallipoli campaign’s failures.

Despite not doing well in Britain, *Gallipoli* reportedly took close to AU\$12 million in Australia and won a host of Australian Film Institute awards including for best picture. In North America, with limited release, it grossed \$5 million; in the US it would become bracketed with Paramount's historically small slate of art-house films. Stigwood also personally negotiated an exceptional \$3 million US TV broadcast deal for *Gallipoli*, via Bruce Gordon, Australian-born head of distribution with Paramount. All in all, the film made a tidy profit for both Stigwood and Murdoch. One authoritative estimate is that over the years following its release, each of the film's backers made five times their initial investment.

At the time of *Gallipoli*'s release, *Sarina* was in the Mediterranean. Flying from Sydney, Stigwood joined her there, as did John Travolta. Once the yacht was out on the Med, the pair discussed Norman Wexler's draft script for *Staying Alive*. In this *Saturday Night Fever* sequel, Wexler made Tony Manero a Broadway chorus-line dancer. Travolta didn't like it. He wanted Tony to be a star. Stigwood backed him, sending the script back to Wexler to rework.

As soon as Travolta disembarked, Barry Gibb and wife Linda came aboard *Sarina* for a make-up cruise with Stiggy. Once the couple left the yacht, in Corfu, a new band of intrepid sailors trooped down the gangplank. This time it was prankster-in-chief Earl McGrath, David 'the Loon' English, RSO's Bill Oakes, lawyer Paddy Grafton Green, record plugger Brian O'Donahue, and a bevy of ladies to keep them amused. At sea, Stigwood's guests went to bed after much eating, drinking and merriment. In the early hours of the morning, they were awoken by cries of alarm. *Sarina*'s old Krupp engines had broken down, and, in heavy weather now, the vessel was being driven towards land.

David English, always a colourful storyteller, would recount that everyone bar Stigwood and himself abandoned ship, with that pair opening a magnum of champagne and awaiting their fate. The ship was swept onto a beach, which, according to English, was populated by naked naturalists, to whom Stigwood extended an invitation to come aboard for champers.

It was a great story, but, says Gini Smythe, who was also aboard, not entirely as she remembers it. 'No one was going anywhere! The captain told us to stay inside and away from the windows. It was either put the yacht on

the beach or let it hit the rocks, so the beach was safer!’ The land was treeless, the beach deserted, as *Sarina* surged bow-first onto the sand. ‘When the sun came up, we found we were just a little way away from a campervan and a very surprised German couple, who resisted our drunken invitation to join us for Bloody Marys.’

Several tugs eventually dragged *Sarina* off the beach and towed her to port, after which Stigwood put her up for sale. *Sarina* was purchased by Greek boat charter millionaire Adreas Liveras. Repairing her, he changed her name to *Rosenkavalier*. Today, she sails under the name *Haida G*.

Even though *Gallipoli* earned him profits and plaudits, Stigwood hadn’t enjoyed the experience. For one thing, it wasn’t a musical, which meant he’d had little emotional investment in the film. Besides, the production had become something of a war between his camp and Murdoch’s camp, with Pat Lovell in between – and Stigwood told associates she’d at times been as annoying as a flea.

Meanwhile, even while *Gallipoli* was playing in theatres, Rupert Murdoch acquired a much larger film company than Associated R&R. After an unsuccessful attempt to take over Warner Brothers, in 1981 he acquired 50 per cent of Twentieth Century Fox. Within several more years he would buy the remaining 50 per cent. Stigwood and Murdoch now had enough on their separate plates and no need for Associated R&R. Each took their share of the spoils, the *Fortress* option was allowed to expire, and Associated R&R folded its tent and disappeared into film history.

Stigwood, giving Beryl Vertue approval to make *Parole*, a telemovie which CBS would air in 1982 starring Ellen Burstyn, personally concentrated on pulling *Staying Alive* together. His *Grease* partner Allan Carr was preparing to shoot *Grease 2* in January. Paramount had put in \$5 million of the \$11.2 million budget, with Carr and Stigwood going 50-50 on the balance. Apart from appointing Bill Oakes to executive produce on his behalf, Stigwood wanted nothing more to do with *Grease 2*. He and Carr had fallen out, badly. During the making and release of *Grease*, Carr had milked all the publicity for himself, excluding all reference to Stigwood.

According to Kevin McCormick, this had sent Stigwood nuts. McCormick overheard a phone call Stigwood made at the time, blasting

Carr. 'He started making fun of Allan's clothes, how ridiculous he was,' McCormick would recall. 'It was hurtful.'

Carr, for his part, thought Stigwood just as ridiculous, for masking his sexual orientation in public, which Carr didn't. Carr made no attempt to hide their mutual dislike. 'Just because we're similarly inclined in our private lives,' he said, 'doesn't mean we have much else in common.' Stigwood now loathed Carr, as did Barry Diller, who banned him from Paramount Studios. Carr would shoot *Grease 2* twenty kilometres away at an abandoned high school in Norwalk.

With his producer's cut of the big budget in mind, Carr dumped the original plan to bring back Travolta and Newton-John and came up with cheap alternatives. Reversing the original film's plot, Carr would have a male outsider come to Rydell High and woo a feisty female student. For his male lead, he cast Scottish actor Maxwell Caulfield, after he saw him in Joe Orton's play *Entertaining Mr Sloane* off Broadway. Stigwood also saw the play, and saw handsome Caulfield on stage at his best, naked. As the female lead, Carr cast Orange County checkout chick Michelle Pfeiffer in her first film role.

Carr had a crush on Caulfield, and was untroubled by the fact his star couldn't sing a note, a problem for the lead in a musical. A pampering Carr convinced the young actor that he could sing like a bird. Caulfield would later say that, for a few months during the winter of 1982 while he was shooting *Grease 2*, he came to believe he was Elvis. Pfeiffer, meanwhile, could hold a tune, just, but in casting her as the sexy teenager Carr mistook Pfeiffer's sullen performance for sultry.

When Stigwood didn't volunteer any Bee Gees music for this sequel, Carr turned to Louis St Louis, who'd co-written 'Sandy' for the first film, to create all *Grease 2*'s music. Carr not only rehired Pat Birch as choreographer, he gave her the director's job. With *Grease 2* her directorial debut, Birch started shooting with an incomplete script and no idea where the story would go. Even her dance sequences suffered as she struggled to turn this Carr plaything into something watchable.

In white tux and black bow tie, Stigwood attended the 11 June 1982 premiere of *Grease 2* at LA's Grauman's Chinese Theatre, accompanied by Gini Smythe. The less than exciting after party was staged by Paramount at

a bowling alley. There, Louis St Louis, who seemed oblivious to the fact his woeful *Grease 2* soundtrack wasn't even being played at the party, came up to a well-oiled Stigwood.

'There's no way I can thank you for this opportunity,' gushed St Louis.

'Oh, yes there is!' Stigwood returned.

There are those who believe that Stigwood wanted *Grease 2* to fail, so that Carr failed. If that was the case, he got his wish. Competing on its opening weekend with *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, *Rocky III* and *Poltergeist*, *Grease 2* was swamped, and sank.

Rated by many critics the worst sequel of all time, *Grease 2* would gross little more than it cost to make. Paramount canned all plans for further sequels. Pat Birch returned to choreography. Maxwell Caulfield would never secure another starring film role. In contrast, Michelle Pfeiffer's onscreen luminosity launched a stellar career. Allan Carr would quickly bounce back, in 1984 staging award-winning Broadway musical *The Birdcage*, before his self-confidence proved his undoing when producing the 1989 Academy Awards telecast. Considered the worst Oscars ever, this camp outing would tarnish Carr's reputation and career.

After John Travolta saw *Rocky III*, which was directed by its star Sylvester Stallone, he told Stigwood he wanted Stallone to direct *Staying Alive* – to give it some *Rocky* energy, he said. Stallone had never directed a musical, but Stigwood always gave Travolta what he wanted, so Stallone got the gig. Given a \$22 million budget, Stallone personally rewrote the Wexler script and hired his brother Frank to create the music.

When Wexler learned that 'Sly' Stallone was creating, in his words, 'a piece of shit', he contemplated having his name removed from the credits. When Stigwood heard the music Frank Stallone came up with, he hurriedly commissioned the Bee Gees to write five new songs for the soundtrack. For the *Staying Alive* shoot in New York over July–September 1982, Stallone trained Travolta like a boxer, replacing flab with muscle tone. But while Travolta was in great shape, the movie wasn't.

Critics slammed *Staying Alive* on its July 1983 release. As the *New York Times* put it, this was 'a sequel with no understanding of what made its predecessor work'. Despite a media mauling, it grossed \$130 million worldwide, with the soundtrack album also selling well. While Stallone was

ridiculed and Travolta's reputation so damaged it would be six years before it was resurrected by *Look Who's Talking*, Stigwood walked away with a pile of cash. Yet he took criticism of the film personally, and hard.

With so many lemons of late, and with his fiftieth birthday looming, Stigwood decided to get out while he was ahead. Well, almost completely out. He was committed to two more movies. One was *Evita*, that ongoing Stigwood cinematic saga. He'd lately hired Ken Russell to direct, giving him a budget of \$15 million, and Russell was hard at work on a screenplay.

The other film was *Young Lust*, a comedy brought to Stigwood by budding producer George Van Noy. Its screenplay was written by actors Robin Menken and Bruce Wagner for comedian Fran Drescher, who'd impressed both Stigwood and John Badham playing a small but important role in *Saturday Night Fever*.

To direct, Stigwood hired Drescher's friend Gary Weis, a former segment director on TV's *Saturday Night Live*. By the time *Young Lust* was completed in April 1984, Stigwood considered it so bad he decided not to tarnish his reputation any further, and never released it. Drescher would have to wait until the 1990s to win fame and fortune with TV's *The Nanny*, her own creation.

Stigwood's withdrawal from show business began with the sale of the remaining 50 per cent of RSO Records to Polygram in 1983. As for the rest of his business, he simply shut it down, closing RSO's offices in New York, Los Angeles and London. 'For Stigwood,' John Travolta observed, 'if it wasn't the pinnacle every time, he wasn't going to stay.' Staff who had worked with Stigwood for years found themselves unemployed overnight, albeit with generous severance packages. Despite being put out of work, many Stigwood employees profess to this day that, while disappointed, they held nothing against their former boss.

Stigwood told Beryl Vertue, 'My family has turned into an empire, and I don't want to do it anymore.' Vertue herself was shellshocked. Husband Clem had recently left her, and now her work world had come to a shuddering end. She would struggle for years with a one-woman film company, Hartswood Films, named after the house where she lived, before turning a book into the 1990s hit British TV series *Men Behaving Badly*. Numerous TV series and documentaries would follow, as Vertue's daughter and granddaughter joined Hartswood. In recent times, the Vertues have had

a worldwide hit with the *Sherlock* TV series starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman.

After Stigwood closed up shop, Kevin McCormick joined Fox 2000, and then Warner Brothers as vice-president of production, once more overseeing other people's movies. He was not so successful when he later went out on his own, trying to emulate Stigwood as an independent producer.

Bob Swash found success as a theatrical producer, in 1989 staging *Shirley Valentine* for Willy Russell, and, later, *Blood Brothers*. Freddie Gershon continued as Stigwood's US lawyer, and set up Music Theatre International, licensing stage musicals around the world.

As for Stigwood, he bought a new boat. *Elpetal*, a twin for *Sarina*, was built in the same Krupp yard in the same year and to the same design, although a little longer. Her first owner had been Russell Alger, chairman of the Packard car company, and, like *Sarina*, she'd sailed under US Navy colours during the Second World War. Purchasing her from Greek millionaire Maris Embiricos, Stigwood changed her name to *Jezebel*, because *Sarina* had been a Jezebel that let him down, or so it was said. Commissioning a multi-million-dollar refit that would take a year, Stigwood withdrew to Bermuda.

Flying into Bermuda's airport, Ken Russell was met by a bronzed Patrick Bywalski, who escorted him to Stigwood's Riva speedboat, which waited at the end of the runway. With Patrick driving, the Riva bounced a terrified Russell across the water to Wreck Hill at what Russell estimated was 70 miles per hour. At Wreck Hill's jetty, waiting staff conducted the shaken director to guest quarters in the poolhouse.

Russell had spent three months writing an *Evita* screenplay, followed by a month scouting European locations and a further nine months conducting screen tests for the role of Eva Peron. Stigwood, Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber unanimously agreed that Che should be played by David Essex, who'd excelled in the role in the West End. Finding Eva was proving much more difficult. After screen tests, Russell had vetoed Rice's preferred actress Elaine Paige, and Lloyd Webber's, Sarah Brightman. He'd been knocked back by Barbra Streisand, but was certain he'd found his *Evita*

after screen-testing Liza Minnelli. He'd come to Bermuda to convince Stigwood to sign off on her.

Suntanned and relaxed, Stigwood was watching CNN when Russell was ushered into the main house's living room. Greeting the director warmly, Stigwood took him on a tour of the estate. He was particularly keen to show Russell giant spider crabs who lived in holes on a Wreck Hill slope. As they waited for crabs to emerge, Stigwood told Russell they were monogamous. Otherwise engaged, the crabs failed to put in an appearance.

'I guess they're all at home fucking their brains out,' commented the always earthy Russell.

Back at the house, Stigwood avoided discussing *Evita*. When Russell arrived for dinner, he brought a videotape containing every *Evita* screen test, including Minnelli's, which he told Stigwood was sensational. Over after-dinner coffee, Stigwood deigned to watch Minnelli's test. He smiled all the way through, but told Russell he'd watch all the tests again before making his decision.

'A deal's in place with Fox,' Stigwood assured Russell. 'They're keen to get started.'

Stigwood had been forced to take the project to Twentieth Century-Fox, by this time owned by Rupert Murdoch, because Russell had told Paramount, which had originally been on board to distribute *Evita*, that he couldn't guarantee a successful film if Elaine Paige were to play Eva. Paramount, knowing that Tim Rice was pushing Stigwood to cast Paige, with whom he was then romantically linked, had subsequently bowed out.

The day following Russell's arrival at Wreck Hill, a taxi pulled up to collect him. He was whisked off to Bermuda's airport without even seeing Stigwood again. After landing at London's Heathrow, Russell was handed an envelope. When the director opened it, he found just two words, from Stigwood: 'Elaine Paige'. Stigwood was remaining loyal to Tim Rice.

Shortly after, Russell was summoned to a meeting at Claridge's with Sherry Lansing, Fox's president of production. As Lansing brought out a magnum of champagne, Russell informed her he wouldn't be directing *Evita* with Elaine Paige in the role. The champagne went back in the fridge. Russell left the project, and Lansing took Fox out of the mix. Five years later, Russell would hear that Stigwood was talking to Meryl Streep about *Evita*, and that Streep was keen to play the role. Russell couldn't see the film ever getting up.

ACT THREE

Stiggy Sails into the Sunset

27.

Not So Plain Sailing

‘Robert was ready for some new faces.’

Gini Smythe

BY AUGUST 1984, after sixteen years with Stigwood, Gini Smythe decided to move on. ‘Robert was not working, and we lived in Bermuda. It was time for both of us to go our separate ways. I needed to have a life outside our little family, and Robert was ready for some new faces.’

Gini would always remain in contact with Stigwood and RSO friends, including Beryl Vertue and Freddy Gershon, and retain fond memories of her years with Stigwood, of the yacht journeys, the all-night parties and Robert’s generosity. She didn’t have another job to go to; it would be a year before New York publisher Edward Lear employed her as his PA. Much later, she would settle in Florida, where, today, a realtor, she will happily sell you a very nice Floridean property.

Shortly after Gini’s departure, Stigwood took delivery of *Jezebel*. When he sailed the big white yacht to New York to show her off, one of the guests invited aboard was handsome American model and budding actor Scott Stallard. ‘My mother was friends with Robert,’ says Stallard. After Stallard sent Stigwood a taped audition for a part in a soap opera he was chasing, he got a job offer from Stigwood, as his new executive assistant. ‘Of course,’ Stallard says, ‘I accepted immediately.’

Stigwood trained Stallard to handle his day-to-day affairs as *Jezebel* sailed the seas picking up and setting down Stigwood’s guests at exotic ports. ‘He was always looking for a memorable day, full of laughter, great wine, and a personal dinner menu in French in front of each place setting,’ says Stallard. It was all about nonstop fun. Stallard didn’t get a day off for six months.

In 1984, Andrew Lloyd Webber premiered a new musical, *Starlight Express*, in the West End. With lyrics by songwriter Richard Stilgoe, Lloyd Webber had conceived a Cinderella story about steam locomotives, inspired by *Thomas the Tank Engine*, involving fifty-six performers sweeping around the stage on roller skates. By early 1985, with the London show a sellout, Lloyd Webber looked to America. Nervous about tackling Broadway alone, he called Stigwood.

Delighted that Lloyd Webber needed him, Stigwood happily came aboard, convincing the composer to follow the pattern they'd created with *Jesus Christ Superstar* by sending a touring version of *Starlight Express* around North America before transferring to Broadway. To manage the tour, Stigwood again brought in Steve Leber, who, with David Krebs, had left MCA to set up on their own. Leber took personal charge of New York auditions that began in May at the Roxy Roller Rink on West 18th Street. He told the press that, with a tour launch date of January 1986, the touring show would be scaled down from the West End original.

Scaled down? ALW never liked scaling down anything, and part of the audience appeal of *Starlight Express*, which didn't have any hit songs to ride upon, was its technically complex and expensive staging. As the weeks passed, Lloyd Webber became increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of touring the show first. In the end, he and Stigwood fell out over the best way to launch *Starlight Express* in America, and their production agreement collapsed. In 1987, Lloyd Webber would launch the show on Broadway in partnership with Lord Lew Grade, Martin Starger and MCA. A touring version would follow two years later.

Jezebel was in the Med when the *Starlight Express* deal fell apart that summer of '85. Stigwood, bitterly disappointed, and tired of sailing, decided it was time to go home to Australia to reconnect with family and friends and revisit youthful haunts. Calling nephew Ron, who was working on a movie outside Sydney, Stigwood instructed him to organise a campervan and driver to take him around South Australia.

When *Jezebel* docked at Nice, Patrick Bywalski left to spend time with Brigitte and his boys, and Stigwood, taking Scott Stallard with him, flew to London. There, the pair boarded the Concorde for New York.

When Stigwood found Pete Townshend aboard the super-sonic airliner, along with actress Tatum O'Neal and her new beau, tennis player John

McEnroe, who had an apartment on Central Park West, Stigwood spontaneously invited all three to dinner at the San Remo. Stallard was sent up to the cockpit to organise a chopper to meet them at JFK; in those days, members of the public were allowed into airliner cockpits. Stallard then called Stigwood's apartment manager, ordering dinner for five.

The next day, Stigwood and Stallard nipped out to Bermuda for two days, before returning to New York to catch a Pan Am flight to Australia. After landing in Sydney on 23 July, they immediately boarded an Ansett flight to Adelaide, where they checked into the Hilton. It took Stallard four days to get over the jet lag. Stigwood recovered in two.

Stigwood and Stallard then partied with Stigwood family members: Gwen and David, Bill and Judith, Joanne and her then husband, and Ron. Next, it was wining and dining a procession of Stigwood friends, most notably Paul Linkson, now general manager of Adelaide radio station 5DN, as well as YTG pal Leo Heffernan and 'the girl who got away', Anne MacMahon.

Although possessing no plans to produce another theatrical show, Stigwood met with local composers while in Adelaide, looking for theatre music, he said. Then, into the campervan piled Stigwood, Heffernan, MacMahon and Stallard, for a trip down memory lane as far as Port Elliot's beach south of Adelaide. Stigwood had a ball. On the road back to Adelaide, they picked up a speeding ticket.

Back in Adelaide, Stigwood and Stallard joined Mel Gibson for the local premiere of *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*, and Stigwood secured Gibson's agreement to meet in Sydney to discuss 'projects'. Following the actor to Sydney, Stigwood checked into the same hotel as Gibson, the Sebel Townhouse celebrity hangout, then sent Stallard to drag the star from the bar at midnight and bring him to their suite. Stigwood and Gibson talked till dawn. In response to Lloyd Webber's *Starlight Express* rebuff, Stigwood had again begun thinking seriously about *Evita*, and it appears he proposed that Gibson play Che. Gibson, for all his faults, knew he couldn't sing, and apparently declined the role.

A year after this Australian sojourn, Stigwood would fly a group of old Adelaide friends to St Thomas in the US Virgin Islands to join *Jezebel*. Stigwood didn't accompany them. *Jezebel's* skipper, Chris Williams, had orders to treat his guests like kings and queens, as the yacht cruised to Virgin Gorda, St Maarten, Montserrat, Dominica, Martinique and Antigua.

The lucky ten were Anne MacMahon, Paul and Eileen Linkson, Leo and Gwen Heffernan, Harold and Deidre Minear, Bette Quinn, and Norma and Ian Beatty. Later, after Paul Linkson suffered a serious heart attack, Stigwood would take over his medical treatment and pay the bills.

While Stigwood and Stallard were travelling, Stigwood told his PA that at one time he'd loaned Richard Branson £1 million, and had been mightily impressed when Branson repaid it within a month, with interest. It's unclear whether this was in 1971, when Branson had tax problems and his mother had to remortgage the family home, in 1972 for the launch of Virgin Records, or for the 1984 launch of Virgin Atlantic Airways. Branson, for his part, has neither confirmed nor denied the story.

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After leaving Australia on 11 August, Stigwood and Stallard returned to New York, and the San Remo. There, Stigwood invited singer Madonna over to discuss *Evita*, with Stallard dispatched in a limo to collect her. The meeting did not go well. Proposing that Madonna play Eva Peron on screen, Stigwood, remaining faithful to Rice and Lloyd Webber, insisted the part be sung-through. Madonna, trying to establish her screen acting credentials at the time, insisted she speak the role. Neither producer nor star was prepared to compromise. After Madonna departed, Stigwood would shelve *Evita* for another four years.

Back in Bermuda, Stigwood reunited with Patrick and welcomed guests. First it was John Travolta and his PA Joan Edwards, and TWA chairman Ed Acker and his wife, Sandy. They were soon joined by Simon Le Bon from Duran Duran and Bob Geldof, bubbling with the success of the recent Live Aid concerts in London and Philadelphia. A week later, when these guests all left Wreck Hill together, they climbed into the Riva to be sped around the coast to Bermuda's airport while Stigwood's Rolls brought their luggage by road. 'We always took guests to Bermuda airport in the Riva,' says Stallard. 'It was more scenic, and much quicker than by road.'

Stigwood was by this time very much part of the Bermudian community. A donor to numerous local charities, he also supported the efforts of a local newspaper editor to secure gay law reform in the territory. Longtime premier of Bermuda Sir John Swan and governor Viscount

Dunrossil both rated Stigwood a close personal friend. For a time, Stigwood was Australian consul in Bermuda, even hosting the Australian national cricket team at Wreck Hill. He also helped Australian television producer Reg Grundy obtain residency in Bermuda, and supported the application of *Jezebel* crewman Martin Wu and his wife Bonnie to migrate to Australia.

Every 26 December, Stigwood threw legendary dress-up parties for 500 at Wreck Hill. One year, it was a toga party, with invitations on scrolls. Another time, invitations were delivered by ‘pirates’ on horseback. Wreck Hill lunches and dinners were ongoing, with a Miss Bermuda frequently sitting at Stigwood’s side.

Pirate parties were a Stigwood specialty. Usually reserved for close friends, harking back to childhood dress-ups with brother Bill and inspired by Wreck Hill’s buccaneering background, pirate parties at the estate and aboard *Jezebel* required everyone to dress as pirates and ‘splice the main-brace’ with abandon. Patrick, Annie Fargue, Freddie and Myrna Gershon, Ed and Sandy Acker, all became pirates. When Brigitte brought the Bywalski boys to visit, they too donned pirate garb.

Eventually, Scott Stallard tired of all play and no work. He had signed on as assistant to a movie producer, only to become a party organiser. ‘I felt I was burning out after three years,’ he says today, ‘and had some dreams and ambitions to follow of my own.’ In 1986, he left Stigwood’s employ. Remaining in Bermuda, Stallard partnered with friends to set up the Olympic Club, the island’s premier health club.

Come 1987, rarely leaving Bermuda, Stigwood put the San Remo apartment on the market. In future, he would take a Waldorf Astoria Towers suite when in Manhattan. He’d spent so little time in the apartment of late that Tom Simpson, his apartment manager for the past five years, spent most days in the San Remo’s private gym, gaining qualifications as a personal trainer, which is what he became once the apartment sold.

The apartment’s new owners were actors Bruce Willis and wife Demi Moore, who forked out \$8 million, double what Stigwood had paid a decade before. They commenced a two-year refurbishment, including ripping out Stigwood’s disco. When the couple divorced in 2000, Moore got the apartment. She eventually moved out, in 2015 emptying it of furniture

and putting it on the market, for \$75 million. She had enough homes, she said.

Even *Jezebel* went in Stigwood's downsizing. As with *Sarina*, *Jezebel's* old Krupp engines let her down. In 1989, Stigwood sold her to oil billionaire John Paul Getty, who extensively refitted her and renamed her *Talitha*, after his wife. Stigwood also sold Redbank in New South Wales, having only ever visited the property a few times. Hunkering down at Wreck Hill with Patrick, he closed the doors on the world.

28.

Lord of the Manor

‘He is a survivor against the odds.’

Andrew Lloyd Webber

BY 1990, STIGWOOD was a semi-recluse at Wreck Hill. For the past few years, James Daley had again worked as his PA, but even he moved on after a decade and a half on Stigwood’s payroll, settling in Utah. ‘It was an amazing ride,’ says Daley. ‘And Robert Stigwood the “hypnotist” inspired me to become the hypnotherapist that I am today.’

Stigwood then rang Patti Mostyn in Australia: ‘What do you think about coming and being my executive personal assistant?’

The offer came at the right time for Mostyn. Having just handled Frank Sinatra’s third Australian tour, she felt burnt out. Husband Eric Robinson thought time in the sun was just what Mostyn needed, so Patti closed down her business and flew to Bermuda, becoming Stigwood’s right-hand woman. At Wreck Hill, she lived, nervously, alone in the gardener’s cottage, with, at her insistence, Stigwood’s security guard sitting in her kitchen every night. There was considerable activity at Wreck Hill, although no show-business dealings to speak of. Stigwood would sometimes become enthused about a new idea, then drop it. His penchant for all things royal at one time had him planning a movie based on the life of Prince Leonard of Hutt, a West Australian cattleman who declared his property the ‘Hutt River Province’, seceded from Australia, and never again paid tax.

Wreck Hill parties, lunches and dinners continued unabated. Former US president George Bush came to stay. Then there was the visit by a team from *Architectural Digest* to feature Stigwood and his house. An Arab prince of large proportions took the entire property for a week to attend a government-sponsored event, having a special elevator installed outside the

main house to carry him up to his bedroom. In return, Stigwood was given the use of a Gulfstream IV jet and crew.

After a year, with her daughter's birthday coming up, Mostyn asked for time off to go back to Australia.

'But, darling, what am I going to do?' Stigwood responded. 'Who's going to look after me?'

Mostyn arranged for a Manhattan-based girlfriend to fill in for her. Several weeks later, back in Sydney, Mostyn received a formal letter terminating her employ: because she'd supposedly violated her contract. 'Contract?' says Mostyn today with a laugh. 'I didn't have one!' Mostyn's girlfriend took her place. Mostyn never did learn what she'd apparently done wrong, but some time later a mutual friend disclosed that Stigwood had learned she had occasionally complained about him behind his back. 'You whinge,' Mostyn acknowledges with a sigh. For the uninitiated, 'whingeing' is Australian for 'complaining'.

The worst part for Mostyn was the fact that Stigwood had only paid her once during the year she worked for him. On the strength of her agreed salary, she'd carried out renovations at her Watson's Bay home in Sydney. She says today she should have engaged a lawyer to secure her outstanding salary, but at the time was too shocked and embarrassed.

Within a few years, Mostyn would bump into Stigwood again. To her surprise, he was his old warm self, as if he'd forgotten her termination. Mostyn had too much pride to say anything about her dismissal, or the back pay, and they again became good friends.

Mostyn remembers Stigwood visiting Australia in the 1990s, one time basing himself aboard a chartered yacht, another time converting a double-decker bus into a giant two-storey campervan in which he toured around accompanied by Patrick and Brigitte.

One man's bad luck is often another's good fortune. And so it was with Stigwood in 1991, not long after Mostyn left his employ. In this case, he was the fortunate one.

Anthony Goddard and his wife, Alix, had purchased the 202-acre Barton Manor estate on the Isle of Wight in 1976. Queen Victoria had acquired Barton Manor in 1846, operating it as a working estate with one hundred employees. Her holiday home, Osborne House, was right next

door, and Prince Albert had remodelled Barton's manor house, which stood on the site of a fourth-century oratory, and its gardens. Russia's Tsar Nicholas II had been among Barton Manor's royal guests, and King Edward VII kept it as his private retreat when he gifted Osborne House to the nation. Barton only came into private ownership in 1922.

The Goddards had poured love, time and money into Barton Manor, establishing a fifteen-acre vineyard, whose wine was consumed at Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament. But then came the Lloyds crash. Anthony Goddard, a Lloyds 'name', had invested everything he had in the financial group, and, like thousands of others, lost everything. Barton Manor was put on sale, but because so many otherwise potential buyers had also suffered in the crash, interested parties were thin on the ground.

Many times, Stigwood had sailed past Barton Manor's kilometre of private beach, on his way to and from Cowes. When he saw that the property, with its rich royal heritage, was on the market in 1991, he swooped, snapping up Barton for just £1.1 million. Before moving in, he initiated improvements: a tennis court, an indoor swimming pool, a sauna, changing rooms. A new Rolls-Royce was also placed on order.

As Stigwood prepared to move to the Isle of Wight, Wreck Hill was sold. Fellow Australian Bruce Gordon, who'd already been living in Bermuda for some time, was the buyer. While still head of TV distribution at Paramount in the US, Gordon had invested in Australia's largest regional television network, WIN, becoming its owner. Paramount had valued him so greatly, they'd kept him on until he turned seventy.

Stigwood set up a company to manage Barton Manor and its vineyard, which Patrick was to run, but, shortly after taking residence, ordered the vines ripped out. In their place, he installed a helicopter landing pad. From now on, Stigwood only ventured beyond Barton Manor by chopper. Initially, fifteen staff ran the house and estate. Later, staff numbers were reduced. For ten years, local hairdresser Mellisa Holme came to the house to cut Stigwood's hair and listen to his showbiz stories.

The impresario wasn't a total recluse: several weekends a year, he opened the estate to the public, with admission proceeds going to the Earl Mountbatten Hospice. A smiling Stigwood mixed with the crowds as they admired his gardens and wandered wide-eyed through the house, whose

walls were lined with gold and platinum records that had once adorned his Brook Street and Central Park West offices.

House guests were fewer at Barton Manor than had been the case at Wreck Hill. When nephew Ron came over from Australia, Stigwood insisted on vacating his own bedroom for him to use. Stigwood was still a chainsmoker, leaving a Rothmans smoking in an ashtray in one room only to light another when he went into the next. The bar still opened at 4.00 pm, with fresh flowers and champagne.

One day in 1992, Paul Nicholas came to lunch. The last time he and Stigwood had seen each other had been in the late 1970s, when TV's *This Is Your Life* had featured Nicholas, and Stigwood had been a reminiscing guest. With friend Ian David, Nicholas had formed a production company, successfully touring *Pirates of Penzance* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* around the UK. Now, they were planning to revive *Grease* in the West End, and Nicholas wanted to use the songs created for the movie, which Stigwood still controlled. Following a convivial lunch, Nicholas popped the question. In response, Stigwood was non-committal.

'It has been lovely seeing you, Bob,' said Nicholas as they parted. 'See what you can do for me on the songs.' Prepared to do the show without the additional music, Nicholas went away believing that his old friend wouldn't release it.

Stigwood had meantime revived the *Evita* movie after socialising with Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh. During that get-together, Stigwood had confided to Lloyd Webber that a hip was giving him hell and his doctor had ordered him to give up booze. ALW would subsequently remark that Stigwood was a 'survivor against the odds', adding, 'I'm sure you know what I'm saying.'

Today, Lloyd Webber won't clarify whether he was referring to Stigwood's years of punishing drinking, or, considering his sex life, the risk of HIV-AIDS, which claimed several close associates including Jeff Tornberg and Paul Jabara. All the time that Stigwood was telling Lloyd Webber about his medical problems, he was sipping a scotch and Coke, and Lloyd Webber wondered out loud whether he should be drinking.

'It's alright,' Stigwood responded with a grin, raising his glass. 'It's Diet Coke.'

Pushing forward with the screen version of *Evita*, Stigwood engaged Hollywood director Oliver Stone to pen a new screenplay and direct. He

also began thinking seriously about getting back into theatrical production. One Sunday, several months after his lunch with Paul Nicholas, he called from a suite at Claridge's and summoned him to an immediate meeting. After Nicholas took a taxi across town, Stigwood revealed that he and Cameron Mackintosh had been discussing doing a West End revival of *Grease*, only to discover that Nicholas had secured the rights.

'Paul, I want to do *Grease*,' said Stigwood firmly.

Nicholas smiled. 'I would be delighted to do *Grease* with you, Robert.'

He and Stigwood went 50-50, cutting Mackintosh out of the equation. Each would put in £1.25 million, with Nicholas defying father Oscar Beuselinck's advice, which was to never put his own money into a show, personally investing £500,000, and finding investors for the balance. While Stigwood funded his £1.25 million contribution and would be involved in casting and venue selection, Nicholas and Ian David would physically produce the show. Stigwood set up a separate company to manage his end, making Patrick Bywalski a director and vice chairman.

Nicholas soon found that Stigwood had lost touch with changes in the theatrical world, and had to hold his hand through pre-production. He also had to pay Stiggy's helicopter bills; every time he attended rehearsals, he came up from the Isle of Wight by chopper.

Their *Grease* revival opened at the West End's 2000-seat Dominion Theatre in July 1993, with American pop singer Debbie Gibson as Sandy and Australian Craig McLachlan playing Danny Zuko. McLachlan, a big name in the UK via the Australian TV soap *Neighbours*, was Nicholas' choice.

After Nicholas flew McLachlan from Australia to London to lunch with Stigwood and himself at the Dorchester, Stigwood agreed with Nicholas' casting without even seeing McLachlan sing or dance. The show opened strongly with £4 million in advance bookings, transferring to the Cambridge Theatre in 1996 with a run that lasted until October 1999. This six-year incarnation of *Grease* proved a nice little earner for all concerned.

Even while they were casting *Grease*, Stigwood sold Nicholas on the idea of turning *Saturday Night Fever* into a stage show, taking it on the reverse of *Grease*'s creative journey. Stigwood of course owned *Fever*'s grand rights. Nicholas deliberately cast another Aussie, Adam Garcia, as Doody in *Grease* with a mind to grooming him to later play Tony Manero

in *Fever*. Garcia had caught Nicholas' eye in the Australian tap show *Hot Shoe Shuffle*, which did good business in London.

Stigwood, meanwhile, focused on *Evita*. In 1994, he found a new production partner in Andrew Vajna, the Hungarian-born Hollywood producer of *Rocky* and *Terminator* movies he'd first met through Sylvester Stallone. Vajna, like not a few independent Hollywood producers, mixed in colourful company. With his former business partner at Coresco Productions reportedly fleeing a \$6.5 million tax bill, Vajna had formed Cinergi Productions and convinced Disney to loan him \$34.5 million. Now cashed up, Vajna was quick to go into business with Stigwood, also bringing in Disney's Hollywood Pictures with extra cash, plus Warner Brothers to distribute.

Oliver Stone had departed the project after falling foul of authorities in Argentina while scouting locations there. As Stigwood gave Stone's script to Vajna, he mentioned that Alan Parker had been his first choice as director. Vajna approached Parker in December 1994, and the director confessed he'd regretted turning Stigwood down on St Maarten fifteen years before. This time, he agreed to take *Evita* on.

The following January, as Parker was reworking Stone's script, he received a four-page handwritten letter from Madonna. Without revealing she'd previously rejected the role of Eva Peron when Stigwood offered it, Madonna told Parker she was desperate to secure the part. Dropping her previous demand for spoken lines, she was now prepared to sing the role through. Madonna became Parker's *Evita*. Meryl Streep was reportedly furious.

With Madonna giving by far her finest performance on screen and Antonio Banderas making a compelling Che and Jonathan Pryce a suitably dictatorial Peron, Parker shot *Evita* in Argentina and Hungary in 1995. Stigwood, who was only seen on the film's London sound stages a few times and managed to get to the Argentinian set once, happily received the plaudits for his eighteen-year effort to get the film to the screen when he attended the London premiere with Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York, on his arm. The pair had become friends when 'Fergie' was researching her book *Victoria and Albert: A Family Life at Osborne House*. Stigwood even arranged a 1996 holiday in Bermuda for his new royal friend.

With a mostly warm critical reception, Parker's atmospheric *Evita* went on to take \$140 million at the box office. It won Rice and Lloyd Webber the

best song gong at both the Oscars and Golden Globes for 'Don't Cry for Me Argentina'.

When the film won the 1997 Golden Globe for best picture, Stigwood made a rare public appearance to accept the trophy, to the displeasure of fellow producer Vajna. The Hungarian claimed he was the reason the movie finally got made, and told the media the now sixty-three-year-old Stigwood was no longer an entertainment industry powerhouse and was 'living in the past'. But Stigwood hadn't lost his old pizzaz; independent of Vajna, he had a special *Evita* medal minted for every member of cast and crew. Perhaps he himself should have received a medal, for perseverance on *Evita* over and above the call of duty.

Subsequently, Vajna relocated to Hungary, where the president made him the country's film commissioner, reportedly leaving a US grand jury investigation into his tax returns in his wake, while Disney took control of Cinergi in lieu of repayment of its outstanding loan. Stigwood's reputation remained untarnished, although he would have his own unpleasant encounter with the tax man down the track.

British journalist Simon Fanshawe, granted a rare one-on-one interview with Stigwood, was ushered into the living room at Barton Manor. Overweight, florid of face, Stigwood was sitting watching the Cheltenham races on TV, and would wager £1750 by phone through the leisurely interview, which lasted much of the day.

Stigwood had agreed to the interview to promote the 1998 West End premiere of *Saturday Night Fever*, which he was producing with Paul Nicholas and Ian David after his successful *Grease* collaboration with the pair. 'I've discovered another big star!' he declared, referring to Adam Garcia, the new Tony Manero, Nicholas' find.

When Fanshawe tried to probe into his subject's personal life and family background, Stigwood repeated old fibs about his family coming from the South Australian rural elite and his father being an engineer. From his mother, he said, he'd learned trust, from his father, honesty, while refraining from revealing that Gordon had often been brutally and cruelly honest with him. Stigwood certainly didn't tell the reporter that, after his father died in Adelaide in February 1988, he hadn't attended the funeral. Or that his mother and stepfather were forgers.

During the interview, Stigwood enthused about another new project. He'd optioned the grand rights to the 1982 book *Cry to Heaven* by Anne Rice (no relation to Tim), the famous vampire story novelist, intending to turn her tale of two boy singers, castrati, in seventeenth-century Italy into a stage musical and movie called *Cry*. 'It's very me,' Stigwood would tell another journalist. He'd even set up a company to market *Cry*, and found a handsome Australian countertenor to play the lead. Yet within months of the Fanshawe interview, Stigwood would close the *Cry* company and drop the project, without explaining why. Anne Rice was left bemused. 'I never discussed it with him in detail,' she says today. 'We had one or two pleasant phone conversations. That was about it.'

In May 1998, *Saturday Night Fever* hit the West End. Stigwood attended the premiere accompanied by the Duchess of York. He'd overseen a rewrite of Norman Wexler's screenplay for the stage, which differed from the movie. For one thing, unlike the movie, the cast had to sing the show's songs. And, to attract a family audience, Stigwood had softened language and storyline, eliminating F's and C's, and the rape scene. He also commissioned Barry Gibb to write several additional songs.

Fever's year-long transition to the stage had been fraught with difficulties, not a few caused by Stigwood. He and fellow producer Paul Nicholas had screaming stand-up rows, and, with almost as much of his own money in the £4 million show as Stigwood, Nicholas held his ground. Just weeks prior to previews, Nicholas totally rewrote the script, bringing back some of the original Wexler grit and replacing dialogue that had become saccharine. His bull-headedness undoubtedly benefited the production, but at the price of his once-close relationship with Stigwood.

With strong advance bookings, *Saturday Night Fever* opened at the London Palladium, next door to the old NEMS headquarters, and ran for twenty-one months, returning investors their money after twelve. As in days of yore, there was a cast album. Released by Polygram, which had retired RSO's famed red cow label by the 1990s, it would sell 150,000 copies. 'Disappointing,' commented Patrick Bywalski to the press.

Foreign productions followed, including at Broadway's Minskoff Theater in 1999–2000. Personally putting in \$5 million of the \$9 million Broadway budget, Stigwood brought in \$3 million of investors' money.

American co-producer Manny Kladitis put up the rest. Launching with James Carpinello in the lead, the show ran for 501 performances, with half-full houses in the final weeks. Times and tastes had changed. The show was never going to emulate *Grease*'s long-running stage success. Time had changed Stigwood too. By the night of the Broadway premiere, the sixty-five-year-old had been diagnosed with diabetes and had broken three ribs and injured a knee in two recent falls.

29.

The Last Lap

‘I mixed with the wrong crowd.’

Robert Stigwood

IN THE ENGLISH summer of 2004, Stigwood was again in the news as a West End revival of *Saturday Night Fever* loomed. The *Daily Express* had even placed him on its Rich List, claiming he was worth £200 million.

Inspired by the reportage, David ‘Loon’ English called best friend Barry Gibb: ‘We must go and see him, Baz.’

After a call to Barton Manor generated a lunch invitation, English and Gibb took a ferry out to the Isle of Wight. As the pair waited in the manor house’s sitting room, Stigwood struggled in on two walking sticks, looking much older than his seventy years. He was flanked by Patrick and one of his now grown-up sons, whom Stigwood introduced as his Gallic PAs. Stigwood revealed that he had recently undergone a hip operation that had gone badly wrong.

‘They said I’d never walk again,’ he said defiantly, before sagging into an armchair and lighting a cigarette.

As they reminisced well into the evening about the good old days, Stigwood was not only in physical pain. The *Daily Express*’s estimation of his wealth was causing him financial pain. Officers of Britain’s Inland Revenue had come calling, asking why he’d failed to pay tax on such a fortune. For one thing, Stigwood returned, he was an Australian resident, with his mother’s home in Adelaide, which he owned, his official domicile. For another, he wasn’t worth anywhere near £200 million. The former statement was clearly a stretch, while a drawn-out audit of his financial affairs would confirm the latter. It wasn’t that Stigwood was poor, but much of his fabulous wealth of the late 1970s had been dissipated over the years by poor creative choices, gambling and a lavish lifestyle.

English and Gibb didn't talk money with Stigwood. Others closer to him would. Stigwood's nephew Ron, who had left the film business in the late 1990s, visited from Australia every year or so, bringing his children as he married and raised a family. And Ron would smile at the familiar sight of the childhood photos of his dad and uncle on Stigwood's bedroom walls, and the framed World War One medals of Gwen's uncle. Seeing Stigwood tightening his belt, Ron questioned the management of his assets.

'Patrick is making a million dollars a year for me,' Stigwood responded.

When Ron suggested that, with his assets, his uncle could make a million dollars a year from bank interest alone, Stigwood changed the subject.

*

That December, Stigwood's now-retired brother Bill rang from Adelaide. Their mother, a widow since the death of David Burrows in the 1990s, was seriously ill with cancer, with her doctor giving her just weeks to live. Although Stigwood was now himself wheelchair-bound, he flew out to Australia to see his mother one last time, with one of Patrick's sons his PA and travelling companion.

Stigwood would spend Christmas with his mother and brother, then go on to Melbourne to attend the 31 December opening of an Australian *Saturday Night Fever* production at the Arts Centre. Gwen proceeded to inform her sons she had no intention of dying, and planned attending March's Adelaide Cup horse race at Morphettville as usual. And she did, weeks after Robert flew back to England.

While in Adelaide, Stigwood visited his old school. He'd previously donated a grand piano to Sacred Heart, and, more recently, the *Banks' Florilegium*, 743 engravings of native flora collected by Sir Joseph Banks on Captain Cook's 1768–1771 Pacific explorations, and purchased by Stigwood in 1993 for £70,000. Selling the engravings individually, SHC put the million-dollar proceeds towards a new performing-arts facility, naming it the Robert Stigwood Centre. Sitting in the Centre's auditorium, Stigwood told the *Advertiser* he was working on an animated version of *Tommy*. Pete Townshend later revealed he was keen on the idea, but the latest generation of film distributors proved uninterested. The project would fail to get off the ground.

*

Stigwood was pleased when Cream got back together for a seven-concert reunion in May 2005. Although long keen to see it happen, he'd played no part in it. The same year, Stigwood moved house. He'd been offered £7 million for Barton Manor, almost 700 per cent more than he'd paid for it, by Nick Lykiardopulo, Greek shipping tycoon and yachtsman who'd won handicap honours in the 2004 Sydney-to-Hobart ocean classic with his 55-foot *Aera*.

With Stigwood properties apparently a jinx to wedded bliss, Lykiardopulo and his wife, Sally, would divorce in 2009 after a twenty-year marriage, with Sally receiving Barton Manor in the settlement. With the estate looking tired, she put it on the market; the coach-house and workers' cottages were deserted, and many of Stigwood's improvements were in poor condition. The walls and ceiling of his indoor pool had been covered with mould even while Stigwood was still in possession.

Stigwood subsequently paid £3.4 million for a long leasehold on Clavering, a 1.72 acre estate in Swinley Road, Ascot owned by the Queen. The royal connection was an attraction, as was the property's proximity to Ascot racecourse and the nearness of London. With Clavering's eight-bedroom, seven-bathroom 1954 house in need of upgrading, expensive renovations to kitchen and bathrooms and the addition of an indoor pool for Stigwood, a gym for Patrick and an entertainment annexe would take a year.

In the meantime, Stigwood moved into the basement of Patrick's Nice apartment block. He soon hated it there. After six months, Barry Gibb, who now resided almost exclusively in Miami, rented Stigwood his twenty-room Beaconsfield house. It had been here that Andy Gibb died in 1988. At Barry's place, with its forty-acre grounds, Stigwood and his dogs Marmaduke the golden retriever and Millie the mongrel spent a much happier six months.

Finally, in 2006, Stigwood and Patrick moved into the refurbished Clavering. Stigwood's master bedroom was upstairs. Patrick took the lone ground floor 'granny flat' bedroom, bought a Porsche, joined a local golf club, and became part of the Ascot scene: unlike Stigwood, who continued to live a reclusive life, only leaving the property to attend the Ascot races and occasional West End theatrical premieres.

Stigwood's staff had been reduced. Two Burmese house-boys, brothers Mani Ram Rai and Jitti Ram Rai now looked after him. Their uncle Prem was Clavering's security guard. There was also a handsome young PA, who organised Stigwood's slim social calendar, plus a handyman/gardener/car mechanic, who lived above the garage, which housed Stigwood's old Rolls and Patrick's new Porsche.

For six years, that handyman/gardener/mechanic was well-built Utah native James Callantine. He had plenty of chats and laughs with Stigwood and Patrick, who spent their days at Clavering at leisure. When Callantine, a budding songwriter, heard that one of Stigwood's godchildren was soon to be married, he wrote a song for the wedding and gave it to his boss, who smiled and thanked him. Callantine ceased working for Stigwood shortly after. Whether that had any connection with his songwriting effort is unclear.

On the subject of godchildren, Yvonne Elliman once rang Stigwood out of the blue. Divorced from Bill Oakes and subsequent husband Wade Hyman, she was hoping her old boss would agree to be godfather to her new daughter.

'I'm already a godfather to so many,' Stigwood responded. 'What's going to happen to them when I kick the bucket?' Elliman took that as a 'no'. To her regret, she and Stigwood never spoke again.

Stigwood's mother finally succumbed to her illness in Adelaide on 27 December 2006, at the age of ninety-four. Robert, accompanied by one of Patrick's sons, flew out for the funeral, and was present when, as per her instructions, Gwen's ashes were strewn at Morphettville racecourse's finishing post.

That October, a year after Stigwood and Patrick moved into Clavering, an electrical fire broke out while the residents were asleep. With Patrick in France at the time, live-in PA Khalid Saeed, a University of Hertfordshire graduate, spotted smoke billowing from a fuse box, and he, Stigwood and the dogs managed to escape unharmed, although house and contents were severely damaged.

'We did lose quite a few things,' Stigwood informed one enquirer. 'But we are insured.'

While his home was being repaired, Stigwood again lived in Barry Gibb's Beaconsfield house. 'Barry has been very good to me,' he said. Until his death, Stigwood called Barry every year, wherever he was, on 1 May, a nod to the Bee Gees' 1968 hit. Ironically, that April, another of Barry's residences, a lakeside house in Tennessee once owned by Johnny Cash, was razed by fire.

In 2009, back at Clavering, Stigwood considered a movie remake of *Saturday Night Fever* after British TV talent show producer Simon Cowell approached him proposing a modern version starring Zac Efron and using the music of Coldplay or rapper Timbaland. Coldplay would in fact close the 2016 Glastonbury Festival playing 'Stayin' Alive' with Barry Gibb. In the end, Stigwood backed away from a remake, worrying that it would damage the integrity and legacy of the original.

The years now passed slowly, with Stigwood rolling about in a wheelchair and spending his days watching TV. At Christmas and on birthdays he exchanged flowers with old friends, including Beryl Vertue, and took duty calls from friends and relatives while soaking in the bath. To reach him, callers were funnelled through three people: a houseboy, the PA, then Patrick.

In early 2012, Stigwood and Patrick fell out, not for the first time, over Stigwood's desire to make another of Patrick's sons his latest PA. Patrick wouldn't sanction it, and went storming off to France; in addition to the Nice apartment, he now also had a house in Paris. Stigwood put Clavering's shortened leasehold on the market that February, asking £1.9–£2.7 million. Where he would go now he didn't say, although a return to Australia wasn't on the cards. By April, he'd dropped the price to £1.75 million. Shortly after, desperately lonely, Stigwood made up with Patrick, the property was withdrawn from sale, and Patrick returned.

Stigwood's boredom was now only alleviated by licensing stage versions of *Saturday Night Fever* in Europe, North America, Australia and Asia, which brought in a steady although not huge income. Stigwood and Patrick attended European premieres together until the impresario's declining health made travel difficult and ultimately out of the question. After eighty-one-year-old Bill Stigwood passed away at South Australia's Yorketown hospital in July 2014 – wife Judith had predeceased him – Stigwood was too frail to travel to Australia to attend his brother's funeral.

Patrick now went to the *Fever* premieres, accompanied by Angela Cotton, an East Cowes accountant Stigwood appointed company secretary to his enterprises. One of the last trips Stigwood made with Patrick was a short jaunt to Paris in 2014 to see producers who were proposing a concert version of *Saturday Night Fever* there in 2017. He agreed to the deal.

Patrick jetted off alone to Manila for the premiere of an Asian version of *Fever* in 2015, and, at the after party, exuberantly announced to the cast of Broadway and Filipino performers that all would be appearing in the next Australian production. This had cast members looking at each other in surprise. Would the Australian actors' union, the MEAA, sanction the wholesale transfer of a foreign cast to Australian stages? The show's Asian licensee Atlantis Theatrical Entertainment Group hurriedly released a clarifying statement, saying it was 'in negotiations' over an Australian production. It never happened. Stigwood ended up licensing a 2016 community theatre production in his homeland, with an Australian cast.

In April 2015, Stigwood celebrated his eighty-first birthday with a party in Clavering's garden, ensconced in a wheelchair and surrounded by former employees. With Patrick and Brigitte Bywalski flanking Stigwood, Beryl Vertue took a rare photo of the trio together. Stigwood could only pull a sour face; his thirty-five-year-old distaste for photos in company with Patrick still held good.

The following month, sixty-year-old Patrick, still trim, handsome and dapper, wheeled Stigwood into Australia House in the Strand, where once he'd collected his mail. That evening, in the Downer Room, Stigwood was inducted into the South Australian Entertainment Hall of Fame in front of a large delegation from Adelaide and old friends including John Reid, Eileen 'Red' Bond and Beryl Vertue.

'I thought you'd all forgotten me,' said an emotional Stigwood after Patrick helped him to the lectern to make a short acceptance speech.

The medal hung around his neck that night was the only award Stigwood ever received. He was inducted into the Knights of Malta in the 1980s, but neither the British nor Australian governments recognised him with an official honour. Many of those he guided to fame and fortune did receive honours, including knighthoods and the peerage. In 1999, Stigwood told *Wall Street Journal* reporter Lisa Gubernick that he was the musical equivalent of a member of the House of Lords, and he seems to have

expected some sort of honour. A year or two before he died, he was asked by nephew Ron why he thought he'd been overlooked.

'I mixed with the wrong crowd,' Stigwood sniffily replied, citing Sarah Ferguson as one such figure frowned on by the establishment.

In the northern summer of 2015, Ron rang his uncle from Queensland for one of their regular catch-ups.

'Are you watching telly, Ron?' Stigwood asked. 'There's a great tennis match on.'

'No, I'm in Australia, Robert,' Ron returned.

'Oh,' Stigwood replied. 'Come round to lunch, then.'

It was with difficulty that Ron was able to make his uncle understand that he was on the other side of the world. Yet, despite the obvious inroads of dementia, Ron could imagine the indefatigable Stigwood living into his nineties like his mother. In their last face-to-face conversation, Stigwood had been nostalgic.

'You know, Ron,' he'd said, 'in my mind I'm still the boy on the Glenelg tram, going to school.'

During their last phone conversation, at Christmas 2015, Ron agreed to lunch with his uncle the following April during his next UK trip. Late on 4 January 2016, Ron received a phone call from his daughter. She'd read online that Spencer Gibb, Robin Gibb's eldest son, had announced Robert's death. Apparently, Angela Cotton had called the Austin, Texas-based Spencer.

Putting in a call to Clavering, the stunned Ron had the news confirmed. His uncle had suffered a fatal heart attack on the night of January 3–4. Contrary to a subsequent RSO media release which stated he had died surrounded by loved ones, Stigwood had been found dead by houseboy Mani; neither family members nor Patrick were present. Patrick and Brigitte flew in from France on 4 January.

30.

Stiggy's Final After Party

‘My life would have been different without him.’

Stephen Komlosy

ROBERT STIGWOOD'S FUNERAL took place at an Ascot crematorium on 26 January 2016, Australia Day. The most notable attendees were Sarah, Duchess of York, and Tim Rice. Many of those expected to attend failed to appear. Spencer Gibb represented the Gibb family. Andrew Lloyd Webber sent apologies. Rupert Murdoch tweeted that he was lucky to count Stigwood as a friend for many years. Freddie Gershon wrote a tribute for *The Huffington Post*. Bill Oakes, Beryl Vertue, James Daley and Scott Stallard were in the relatively small crowd that did turn up, as were Stigwood's longtime lawyer Paddy Grafton Green, more recent business partner David Herring, and a toothless fellow who revealed he'd been an RSO office boy at Brook Street in the 1970s.

Stephen Komlosy, Stigwood's first business partner, came accompanied by third wife Patti Boulaye. Nigerian-born actress and singer Boulaye made her first appearances on the London stage in Stigwood productions *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*; Paul Nicholas cast her in *Hair*. Boulaye had starred as Yum Yum in *The Black Mikado* at Komlosy's Cambridge Theatre for two years before Komlosy met her in 1975. The couple had married in 1979 and had two children. ‘I was surprised that I got quite emotional,’ says Komlosy today about his reaction to Stigwood's funeral. ‘I guess he was an important mentor for me, and my life would have been different without him.’

Only two people spoke at the service. The first was Patrick Bywalski. Many mourners could not comprehend why this Frenchman, who was accompanied by wife Brigitte and their sons and daughters-in-law, spoke about their late boss and friend in such personal terms. Stigwood had done a

thorough job of keeping his relationship with Patrick under wraps for thirty-six years, as exemplified by an encounter that took place in an Ascot pub just prior to the service. Ron Stigwood was sheltering there from the winter cold when approached by Stigwood's half-sister Heather Moore.

'Who's going to run the company now?' Heather asked.

'Patrick, of course,' Ron replied.

Heather was shocked. As far as she knew, Patrick had been merely Robert's personal assistant.

Tim Rice delivered the funeral's main eulogy. He spoke well, and fondly, of his long business and personal relationships with Stigwood. When he told of first hearing John Leyton's 'Johnny Remember Me' while travelling on a ferry to France, he brought a smile to the still handsome features of Leyton, who was among the mourners. Leyton gives Joe Meek and Charles Blackwell more credit for his success as a recording artist than Stigwood, but he still turned up at the funeral to honour his first manager, the ambitious young Aussie he knew as Bob Stigwood.

All too soon, the funeral was over, and Stigwood's coffin was sliding into fiery oblivion after a brief ceremony, and a few doves were released into a leaden sky. 'It lacked lustre,' says a surprised Patti Mostyn, who'd come from Australia and attended in the company of one-time Elton John PA Bob Halley. Patrick had organised an after party at Ascot Racecourse. Mostyn got lost and failed to find the venue. Those who did go to the racecourse were disappointed.

'Where's the champagne?' wondered Ron Stigwood. The wine on offer was red and white, but no champers. No Dom. No Cristal. What was going on? Robert Stigwood's very last after party, and no champagne? Stigwood had in fact asked for a big, fun party as his send-off, but there was little fun. Patrick closed the bar at 4.00 pm, declaring that he wanted guests to drive home sober.

At Patrick's invitation, Ron Stigwood and son Peter were staying at Clavering. When they arrived, Ron had found the house devoid of food. As he and Peter set off to an Ascot supermarket to buy supplies, Patrick asked them to also bring him back beer. At the after party, Patrick told Ron he intended taking Robert's ashes to Adelaide, and Paddy Grafton Green informed Ron he would shortly forward details of his uncle's will. Grafton Green was also still lawyer to David Bowie, who passed away just six days

after Stigwood, and a week later he would release Bowie's will, which entailed an estimated £161 million estate.

Back in Australia, family members waited months without hearing anything about Stigwood's estate, which the British media estimated to be worth as much as £220 million. Grafton Green, who, with Patrick, was an executor of Stigwood's will, said he could only provide details once assets and liabilities had been identified and valued, which could take six months. Among those assets, he said, was a large quantity of furniture, pictures, etc, that had once filled Stigwood's multiple homes. And, of course, there would be 40 per cent British inheritance tax to pay.

In March, Patrick and Brigitte arrived in Adelaide toting Stigwood's ashes, which they sprinkled at Morphettville racecourse's finishing post, where the ashes of Robert's mother had likewise been spread. Before returning to Europe, Patrick and Brigitte took off for a Great Barrier Reef holiday.

Stigwood friends and family were informed that, in April, Barry Gibb would host a memorial concert for Stigwood. This soon fell through, so Angela Cotton set up a 9 July Stigwood memorial function in the Dorchester's Crystal Room. The entertainment was to be a video put together by Scott Stallard and his son, using footage Stallard had shot of his boss and guests, accompanied by a soundtrack of RSO music. Stigwood's sister Heather and her husband were the only family members to attend this Dorchester event. Barry Gibb, Pete Townshend and Andrew Lloyd Webber were there, but, overall, attendance was small.

By this time, without providing the will itself, Paddy Grafton Green revealed to family members that Stigwood had left sums of between AU\$25,000 and AU\$50,000 each to relatives including Ron, Joanne, Heather and Claire. The bulk of the estate would go to Patrick Bywalski and his sons. And, of course, Patrick was now chairman of all Stigwood companies. Ron Stigwood was not entirely surprised that Patrick and his boys were the will's major beneficiaries. His grandmother had seen this coming. A few years before her death, Gwen had warned Ron, 'Don't let the Frogs get it all.'

Stigwood's final will of 2014 was not made public, and is never likely to be. That will, witnessed by Stigwood's house-boys, but not a lawyer, and in which his half-sisters Heather and Claire were described as his 'step-

sisters', Stigwood bequeathed a number of people small mementos, with his gold and platinum records going to Sacred Heart College.

In addition to leaving the AU\$25,000–\$50,000 legacies to family members, he bequeathed 'my friend Patrick Alfred Bywalski' £1.5 million in cash, plus his house Clavering and his 'entertainment assets', all of which would go to Patrick's sons in the event of his death. Patrick was also excused repayment of loans Stigwood had made to him, even those secured by mortgages.

The financial bequests had changed somewhat since Stigwood's previous will, written in 2007 and in which Stigwood had claimed Australian domicile via the Adelaide house he'd bought his late mother. Back then, he'd left £50,000 to each family member and £500,000 to Patrick. There was a caveat attached to Stigwood's final will: should any family member contest it, they would automatically lose any legacy he had left them.

Stigwood's wills made no mention of his Zurich accounts with Swiss bank Credit Suisse, of offshore trusts, or of real estate other than Clavering, and authorised his trustees to use his entertainment assets to pay off debts. The most recent company returns for RSO Ltd in fact showed the company's debts outweighing assets by more than £2 million. In 1999, Patrick Bywalski had told the *Wall Street Journal* that 70 per cent of Stigwood's income came from royalties from his entertainment assets, with the rest generated by trusts in Bermuda. Neither the 2007 nor 2014 wills made mention of those trusts.

Once Stigwood's estate finally passed British probate in November 2016, Grafton Green, his lawyer and co-executor of the estate along with Patrick Bywalski, instructed Credit Suisse in Zurich to pay Stigwood family members the financial legacies left to them in the will. For many months, the bank failed to even acknowledge the executor's repeated instruction. This, he said, was not an uncommon practice with Swiss banks. By February 2017, Grafton Green was talking about engaging Swiss lawyers to take on Credit Suisse. In April 2017, the Stigwood family legacies were finally paid. Meanwhile, Patrick and Brigitte Bywalski had taken up residence at Clavering.

On the face of it, Stigwood's vast fortune had been greatly reduced, but we will never know how much remained salted away in Bermuda, or in Switzerland, where his accounts were handled by Credit Suisse's Special

Clients Unit. This was Stiggy's last big secret, known only to him, and to Patrick.

Robert certainly hadn't died a pauper like onetime business partner Michael White. Nor did he starve to death like King Midas, a figure to whom he'd been likened. Stigwood's last days were spent in comfort at his Ascot mansion, surrounded by gold records, loyal staff and rich memories.

*

What had made Stigwood so successful in his glory years? What gave him the chutzpah to boldly go where no one else had gone before? Bill Oakes hit the nail on the head, at least in part, when he said: 'I think his being Australian had a lot to do with it – that sort of buccaneering adventurism, that entrepreneurship.'

Three factors characterised Stigwood's successes, and failures: he used other people's money, had good right-hand men, and, ever the gambler, frequently bit off more than he could chew and then chewed like mad backing his own judgement.

So, thank you, Stiggy, 'the amusing show-off', as the *Adelaide Advertiser* described him when he was just twenty, for a life well lived, and for making superstars of the Bee Gees, Cream, Clapton, Travolta, Rice, Lloyd Webber *et al.* Would those artists have been as successful had there not been a Robert Stigwood? Who knows?

What is certain is that, with his help and his belief, they survived, thrived and sometimes revived in the cut-throat world of popular entertainment, and gave millions memories they wouldn't trade for all the money in Bermudian trusts. And this musical prince from Port Pirie had a right royal good time doing it.

'If there is reincarnation,' said Barry Gibb, 'Robert will come back as Louis XVI.'

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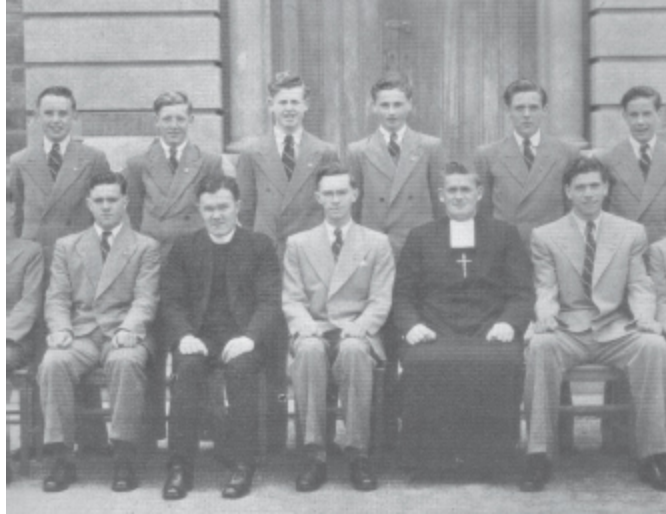
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Two childhood photos prized by Robert Stigwood, of his elder brother Bill and himself, taken in Adelaide in the 1940s. Both hung in his bedroom until the day he died. *Courtesy of the Stigwood family*



Stigwood (second from left, back row), with other Young Catholic Students leaders at Sacred Heart College, Adelaide, 1950. His good friend and YCS president, Paul Linkson, sits between the Catholic brothers in the front row.

Paringa Hall Collegian



Paul Linkson, Sacred Heart College school captain and head prefect, a school friend who was also involved in amateur theatre in Adelaide with Stigwood. Linkson became general manager of Adelaide's Radio 5DN, and later in life Stigwood paid Linkson's medical bills when he was seriously ill. *Paringa Hall Collegian*



British theatre couple Hector Ross and June Sylvaine, who employed Stigwood in England and taught him how *not* to be a theatrical producer.

Ron Case/Keystone/Getty Images



Sir Joseph Lockwood, Chairman of EMI, shaking hands with Stigwood on the groundbreaking record leasing deal with Robert Stigwood Associates.

Herald & Weekly Times Limited portrait collection



Stigwood and business partner Stephen Komlosy's first British star, actor and singer John Leyton, lounging on the Austin-Healey convertible he bought with the proceeds from his first hit records. *John Leyton*



RSA singer Simon Scott, with the infamous plaster bust Stigwood had made of him. *John Pratt/Keystone Features/Getty Images*



Ahmet Ertegun, president of the US's Atlantic Records and close friend of Stigwood, with Cream's Jack Bruce, Eric Clapton and Ginger Baker, and Brian Epstein, the Beatles' manager, who brought Stigwood into NEMS Enterprises to take over from him. Ertegun only signed Cream to Atlantic when Stigwood told him he had to take them to get the Bee Gees. *Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images*



Stigwood followed by his financial whiz David Shaw after they land at London Airport from Monaco the day after Brian Epstein's death. *George Stroud/Express/Hulton Archive/Getty Images*



On the rebirth of RSO, Stigwood quickly acquired Associated London Scripts (ALS). In this February 1968 publicity shot, he is seen with ALS's Beryl Vertue, the Bee Gees, comedian Frankie Howerd, and legendary comedy writers Ray Galton and Alan Simpson. All had joined Stigwood's 500-plus clients and staff, who would eventually also include Yvonne Elliman, Rod Stewart and Fleetwood Mac. *Watford/Mirrorpix via Getty Images*



‘King’ Robert hosts one of his famous parties at the Old Barn, his estate on the northern fringe of London. In the background, eccentric Stigwood client and next-door-neighbour Ginger Baker of Cream. *Courtesy of the Stigwood family*



Stigwood was determined to make Paul Nicholas, aka Oscar, a star. Here, Nicholas is in the centre of the cast of Stigwood's London production of *Hair*, on his way to becoming a musical theatre star. *Larry Ellis/Express/Getty Images*



Stephen Komlosy, Stigwood's partner in Robert Stigwood Associates, shown here with his third wife, Patti Boulaye. *Stephen Komlosy*



With Stigwood and MCA Records executive Ned Tanen watching on, Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber sign the grand rights deal with Stigwood for *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the first of three Rice/Lloyd Webber musicals Stigwood would produce around the world. *Everett Collection Inc /Alamy*



Eric Clapton emerged from drug rehab to appear in this scene from Stigwood's hit movie production of the Who's *Tommy*. Clapton is seen with Who members Roger Daltrey, John Entwistle and Pete Townshend. The Who had launched Stigwood's Reaction record label with the hit single 'Substitute'. *Everett Collection Inc /Alamy*



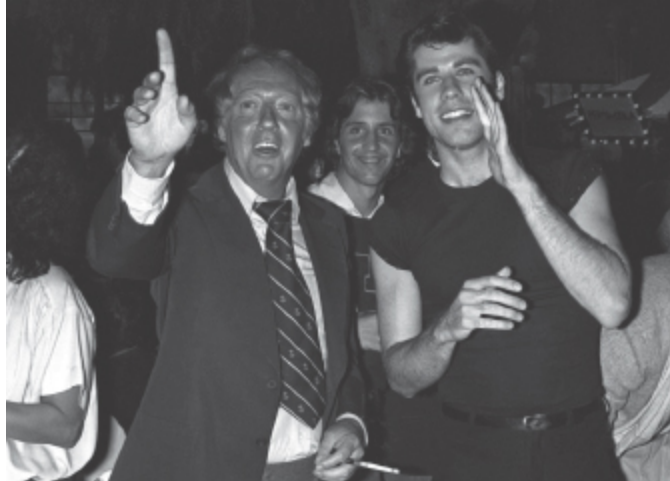
Stigwood puts on a brave face at the Plaza Hotel after party for the premiere of his Broadway production of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band on the Road*. Composer John Lennon, seated, is not so happy. *Waring Abbott/Getty Images*



Christmas 1976 at Palm Grove, Stigwood's first Bermuda estate. Among those around the dinner table are, at the immediate left, Stigwood's nephew and assistant Ron and Stigwood's then London PA Gini Smythe. Stigwood is on the far right, with Myrna Gershon beside him. His New York PA Joy Macmillan is fourth from right, with, beside her, Kevin McCormick, who had recently been promoted from the role of Stigwood's executive PA to become executive producer of the movie *Saturday Night Fever*. *Courtesy of the Stigwood family*



Stigwood liked surrounding himself with pretty women for photos. Here, with his massive private yacht *Sarina* docked near London's Tower Bridge in the background, he is flanked by Brigitte Bywalski, wife of his companion/assistant Patrick Bywalski, and Stigwood PA Gini Smythe.



Stigwood and his new star John Travolta. Stigwood signed then TV actor Travolta to play the male lead in three of his movies, including *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease*. *Brad Elterman/FilmMagic/Getty Images*



Olivia Newton-John, female lead in the *Grease* movie Stigwood produced with Allan Carr, photographed with Andy Gibb, fourth Gibb brother and briefly a huge solo star for Stigwood's RSO Records – Andy wears a jacket bearing the iconic RSO Records red cow logo. Olivia and Andy appeared together at the UNESCO benefit concert Stigwood produced with David Frost. *Globe Photos Inc/Zuma Wire*



Celebrating Associated R&R Films' production of the Peter Weir movie *Gallipoli*. With producer Stigwood are the film's stars Mel Gibson and Mark Lee, and Stigwood's then cinematic partner, media mogul Rupert Murdoch. *Fairfax Syndication/McNeil*



Back in Bermuda, Stigwood resumed hosting friends at his Wreck Hill estate. Here, in the Riva speedboat heading for Bermuda's airport after a memorable stay, are guests including Duran Duran's Simon Le Bon, TWA chairman Ed Acker and his wife Sandy, and John Travolta and his PA Joan Edwards (obscured). *Courtesy of Scott Stallard*



At Corfu, Stigwood inspects the crew of his second huge private yacht, *Jezebel*. Courtesy of Scott Stallard



At a pirate party aboard *Jezebel*, RSO Records' Bill Oakes, Brigitte Bywalski, Patrick Bywalski, Stigwood executive PA Scott Stallard, Stigwood himself, and, in the front, the Bywalski boys. *Courtesy of Scott Stallard*



At the Adelaide Hilton on a 1984 visit to Australia, Stigwood hosts a group of his nearest and dearest. Beside Stigwood, who is at the extreme left, is his sister-in-law Judith. Behind him are his niece Joanne, brother Bill, Anne MacMahon (‘the girl who got away’), Stigwood’s stepfather David Burrows, executive PA Scott Stallard, and Stigwood’s mother Gwen.

Courtesy of Scott Stallard



Stigwood with his friend Sir John Swan, Premier of Bermuda, and a Wreck Hill house guest, former US president George Bush. *Courtesy of the Stigwood family*



Accepting Best Picture award for *Evita* at the 1997 Golden Globes, male lead Antonio Banderas, producer Stigwood, director Alan Parker, and producer Andrew Vajna. *Frank Trapper/Corbis via Getty Images*



Stigwood and Bee Gees Barry, Robin and Maurice Gibb accept an 'Outstanding Achievement' award at the 1997 Brit Awards. The brothers had refused to accept the award unless Stigwood was included.

JMEnternational/Redferns/Getty Images



Stigwood escorts Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York, to the premiere of his West End production of *Saturday Night Fever*, which he staged with old friend and client Paul Nicholas. *Globe Photos/Zumapress.com*



Stigwood and his dogs at Barton Manor, the large Isle of Wight estate he purchased in 1991. It had once been owned by Queen Victoria. *Terry O'Neill/Hulton Archive/Getty Images*



Stigwood with his nephew, assistant and protégé Ron Stigwood, who worked on numerous Stigwood projects, including the *Saturday Night Fever* movie. *Courtesy of the Stigwood family*



Stigwood's father Gordon and brother Bill, while staying with Stigwood in Bermuda. Despite the fact that Gordon never approved of his youngest son's lifestyle, or supported him, Stigwood generously flew his father to stay at his various homes in England, the US and Bermuda. *Courtesy of the Stigwood family*



Stigwood with his colourful, party-loving mother Gwen Burrows, whom he adored. He would never mention the fact she was a convicted forger.

Courtesy of the Stigwood family



In 2007, on his last visit to Adelaide, Stigwood, by that stage wheelchair-bound, sits in the music centre named after him at Sacred Heart College, his old school. The South Australian government also presents annual fellowships in Stigwood's name to talented musicians and aspiring theatrical entrepreneurs. *Brenton Edwards/Newspix*



In the kitchen at Clavering, Ascot, his final home, on the occasion of his seventy-sixth birthday in 2010, Stigwood with his companion/assistant of thirty-six years, Patrick Bywalski. *Courtesy of the Stigwood family*

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Stephen Dando-Collins is the author of the acclaimed *Captain Bligh's Other Mutiny*. *Pasteur's Gambit* was short-listed for the science prize in the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards and won the Queensland Premier's Science Award. *Crack Hardy*, his most personal history, received wide acclaim. *Mistaken Identity* tells another episode of previously undiscovered Australian history, and his biographies include *Sir Henry Parkes: The Australian Colossus* and *The Hero Maker: A Biography of Paul Brickhill*. He also writes about American and ancient Greek history, and his series about the legions of ancient Rome has found considerable success in the US, UK and Australia and been translated into numerous foreign languages. Stephen has also written several books for children and young adults. Stephen and his wife, Louise, live and write in a former nunnery in Tasmania's Tamar Valley.

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Theatrical producers and directors – Biography

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