

Tam

Let's be honest about it now: the early 1970s wasn't exactly a golden era in the history of pop music, was it? The sixties were a hard act to follow, sure, what with the Stones and the Beatles, to say nothing of the Beach Boys on the other side of the Atlantic. Then there was all that wonderful blues-based rock stuff, Cream and so on, and the Californian marijuana-based music; and Dylan. But by the seventies, bands seemed to feel the need to *shout* to get themselves noticed, either literally, by turning the volume up seventeen notches or so, or metaphorically, by dressing up in silly costumes and outrageous make-up. The act became more important than the music itself, and old-fashioned 'pop music' simply went out of fashion.

Not that producers and record labels didn't try. No-one was quite sure what singles would sell, or indeed if singles would sell at all; this was the heyday of the album, particularly the themed concept album where half a dozen numbers of varying quality could be padded out with electronic mash, strange noises, and little poems, packaged together in some sort of dreamy-looking cardboard sleeve full of photographs, more poetry, a list of every conceivable individual remotely connected with each track, and of course the obligatory lyrics. A single? Singles – and those who sang on them – were for *Top Of The Pops* and for the musical interlude in whatever variety show was on television that particular Saturday night. Already, singles were more likely to be bought not by teenagers but instead by their parents, trying to keep up and not doing a very good job of it.

Tam Cantlay's band, the Hot Flushes, played at discos in the central Scottish town of Falkirk and its surrounding parts: Grangemouth, Denny, even the odd visit to Bonnybridge. Mostly, they played covers of songs they'd picked up from their own record collections, but a couple of the band fancied themselves as

songwriters, too, and they liked to slip the odd self-penned number into their act each night. Tam was the front man, played rhythm guitar and sang lead vocals, and in addition organised all the bookings, which he was able to do without difficulty at the same time as his day-job, working as a clerk in an insurance office.

The Hot Flushes had made a couple of demo tapes in a local Falkirk recording studio. One day, and without consulting the others in the band, Tam decided to send some tapes of the band performing two of *his* own personal songs to a handful of recording labels. To his great surprise, one of them, Jupiter Records, got in touch with him to ask when they would next be playing, which as it happened was to be at a Falkirk youth club that very Saturday. Tam decided not to tell the rest of the band because – well, he said it was in case they got stage-fright, but really it was because he wasn't sure if they'd be pleased or not. In the event the Hot Flushes were only average, but Tam gave one of his best-ever performances.

Afterwards, a man, clearly from Jupiter Records because he was actually wearing a *suit* at a disco, approached him quietly. Wearing sunglasses, although it was nearly pitch dark where they stood in the hall, he said, “Not bad, son, we might be able to use you. Can you make it to Grahams Road on Tuesday?”

Tam, of course, was delighted. “You want us there on Tuesday? Great! I'll go and ask the others. What do we need to bring?”

“Don't bother with the others, son, it's just you we're interested in. We can make something out of you.” He handed Tam a business card'.

Charles Carter
Jupiter Records
Grahams Road
Falkirk

“There’s a studio there where we can do a decent demo tape – a professional one – and we’ll take it from there.”

So Tam phoned in sick to the bank that Tuesday, and he turned up in his best suit at Grahams Road in Falkirk for the demo tape anyway. But Tam was also wearing another other important item of clothing: a pair of leather boots sporting incredibly high cuban heels. These were no fashion statement, it was simply that Tam was tiny, under five feet tall in his stocking soles, and he wore cuban heels to lessen the effect, at least he hoped it might. In practice, though, the way he strutted around in the cuban-heeled shoes only served to draw attention to his height. Not that it seemed to matter to the people in the studio.

There were a number of staff in the recording area. There was a bass player, a guitarist who sat down to play, a keyboard player and two drummers, who looked they might be twins. There was a sound engineer, and two other personnel in suits. Another was Carter, the dark-glassed man who’d watched him in the Falkirk youth club.

“Ever cut a track before, Tam?”

Slightly startled by the ‘cut a track’ reference, Tam stumbled over an admission that he hadn’t.

“The trick is to pretend you’re singing to a crowd of thousands. Imagine we’re not here, and the band is at your command.”

“Right, Mr Carter. I’ll try my best.”

“Oh, and don’t call me ‘Mr’ Carter. It isn’t cool, Tam. Call me Charlie.”

“Right, Mr... I mean Charlie. Which of my songs do you want me to sing?”

“Oh sorry, didn’t I say? It’s not one of *your* songs we want, it’s a song one of our resident writers put together. It’s called *I’m*

Gonna Make It Big With You. It's a kind of novelty song, it's not hard. We just need a singer and we can put it out." As he read through the lyrics, it slowly dawned on Tam that his big chance owed very little to his singing ability after all; the record company wanted someone small, someone *very* small in fact. To compound the humiliation, Jupiter Records absolutely insisted that Tam be known as 'Long Tom Cantlay', inviting anyone watching to burst out laughing when they set eyes on him.

When he was being totally honest with himself, Tam admitted to being just four feet seven inches tall. Growing up, there had naturally been concerns that there was something wrong with him, and he had had numerous visits to hospitals for tests. But after exhaustive investigation, the medics had eventually decided that Tam was just small, in the same way that some people are very tall. Putting a positive spin on things, the doctors pointed out that he was only fourteen inches from the average height, whereas many basketball players had to put up with being around seven feet tall. They noted that Tam's parents were both very small, too – indeed Tam's mother was only an inch taller than he – and the general scientific consensus was that small people and tall people were simply the result of natural selection. Because all of his family were small, Tam never felt too bad about his height, while his job as a telephone operator meant that the public at large were completely unaware of his appearance.

Only when he was out with his mates socially did Tam ever feel his lack of height. Girlfriends might have been hard to come by, but because he was basically a decent guy and tried to be cheery all the time, his chums looked after him. On the very rare occasions when he found himself in a fight, either at school and once on a Friday night when he was eighteen, Tam could hold his own long enough for bystanders to intervene on his behalf with a "go and pick on someone your own size" to his adversary – a very effective putdown.

But for someone – even a record executive seemingly offering Tam a golden opportunity for stardom – to deliberately play on Tam’s height, or lack of it, that was pretty hard for Tam to swallow. He was too stunned to offer any complaint for the moment, but he learned there and then that the pop music industry was actually a dirty, dirty business. Which two could play.

Tam put his heart and soul into *I’m Gonna Make It Big With You*, and he was impressed by the session musicians drafted in to back him: a huge heap of beard and hair called Dave Norman played rhythm guitar; an Irish chap called Malone played bass, keyboards were played by someone called George; and, memorably, a pair of identical twins played drums. Actually, they weren’t that memorable – Tam could never remember either of their names. But they were good. Unfortunately the song was simply awful, and everybody knew it. It turned out that the songwriters, who wanted released from their contract, were engaged in a feud with Jupiter Records and their means of escape was to write such bad songs that Jupiter would eventually give up and let them go. Jupiter’s response was to record the songs and release them in an attempt to ruin the songwriters’ reputation. This was the last, and worst, song in the battle.

Tam was a quick learner, however. Recognising that all records need a B side, that the songwriters didn’t have any more numbers, and that Jupiter certainly wan’t going to waste a decent one of its own from another of its writers, he came up with a suggestion. He’d come prepared to sing one of his own songs anyway, and he produced a little ditty called *Any Way You Want Me You Can Have Me*, which was quickly recorded by the same musicians and added as the B side.

As everyone predicted, *I’m Gonna Make It Big With You* by ‘Long Tom Cantlay’ was a monumental flop, charting at number 1278. At its peak. Jupiter Records effectively abandoned the

record, deciding that anything spent on promoting it was merely throwing good money after bad. The singles sat in warehouses, forgotten and unloved for several months and Tam himself returned to his day-job of helping phone customers connect with friends, family members, difficult-to-find businesses and – occasionally – emergencies. In the meantime, he was forming a plan.

Tam followed BBC's Radio One keenly, and one of his friends suggested sending his single to some of the DJs prepared to play less mainstream music. But Tam's plan was not to promote *I'm Gonna Make It Big With You*, but instead to get them to play his own song from the B side. In addition, Tam's accompanying letter to Annie Nightingale, John Peel, Bob Harris and others portrayed himself as a victim of a corporate recording system that had plucked him off the street then abused and demeaned him. It was a plan that bore some fruit; his own song *Any Way You Want Me You Can Have Me* started to receive a little play time late at night on some of the minority programmes. In time, *Any Way You Want Me You Can Have Me* made some inroads into the Hit Parade at the second attempt, eventually reaching No. 23, and 'Long Tom Cantlay' even appeared on Bob Harris' late-night cult TV programme *The Old Grey Whistle Test* – which Bob was only too happy to preface with Tam's sad story of the "midget abused by the system".

It was at this point that Tam's played his little trump card.

Jupiter had been so engrossed in its fight with the songwriter that it failed to take its usual care with the B side of Tam's single, and it forgot to acquire the rights to Tam's song *Any Way You Want Me You Can Have Me*. When the royalties started to flow in for Tam's single, Tam let it run for a little while, then gently enquired where his share was. Jupiter were furious, of course, and even tried to say that the rights were actually theirs, but Tam was having none of it. He took legal advice and threatened court

action. Despite the likely costs to Jupiter of contesting such a lost cause, the record company reckoned it could grind Tam into the ground, or at least it did until a series of headlines – each a variant of *Little Guy Takes On Giant Bullying Corporation* – appeared in the tabloid newspapers. From then on, there would be only one winner. Tam’s dues were paid in full.

But of course he paid a heavy price. Not only did Jupiter terminate his contract immediately, Tam found that no other recording company would touch him either. It was clear that he’d been blacklisted, and there was little he could do about it: his recording career was over almost as soon as it had begun.

Tam went back to working as a telephone operator, and even patched up his quarrel with the Hot Flushes, so that he found himself back on the wedding reception and birthday-party circuit in Falkirk – although now, of course, they invariably finished with their ‘big hit’ *Any Way You Want Me You Can Have Me*. Tam also began to develop a love-life of sorts, mostly slightly older women who felt sorry for him, wanted to look after him, that sort of thing. Tam was grateful for their attention, but as he became older himself, he found the women who wanted to be near him were starting to be in their sixties and even seventies. In the meantime, his career in the telephone industry was starting to stagnate, too, until finally, in 2002, he was made redundant.

Tam wasn’t destitute. He was old enough and wise enough to have salted away some money for a small pension, and – never short of grand ideas – he had other plans, too. Over those three decades years, he had got to know most of the music, comedy and dance talent in the Falkirk area, and now he set himself as a musical agent called The Real Deal, operating out of a small office in central Falkirk. Tam’s speciality was to listen to up and coming groups and ‘discover’ them, set them up with a few gigs or a small recording deal, then to pass them on to what he called “the big boys” to take them on to the very top of the tree. For

Tam this was a win-win idea. First, he charged more than most agents, explaining that he needed to recover his costs quickly before “the big boys moved in”. Secondly, he was spared the grief of working at national and international level, employing extra staff and so on; frankly, Tam knew he’d be out of his depth. Finally, although his acts didn’t know it, he received a healthy commission for handing over his charges to “the big boys”. His first big success was an electronica group called The Maplins, who moved on from him to the giant Limpet Agency, but retained an affection for Tam for ever after, grateful for his help in their early years.

Tam liked to remind everyone of his former glories, or to be precise, his former glory with *Any Way You Want Me You Can Have Me* – to the extent that anyone making a telephone call to The Real Deal was forced to listen to three choruses before being allowed to speak to anyone. Tam was the only employee; the muzak was mere vanity. But he had a surprisingly kind heart. In 2010 he stumbled across a young man called Evelyn Kerr – fresh out of Falkirk Young Offenders’ Institution having been released having served five years for killing his father. Tam quickly established that Evelyn wasn’t actually genuinely violent, but his father was – Evelyn had hit his father on the head with a heavy pan in order to stop him killing his mother, with fatal results. Prison, of course, had turned Evelyn into a real hard man but now he was desperate to escape the clutches of the local gang and start again. He’d little or no chance of finding a job, of course, so Tam came up with an idea. Calling on three other young singers and dancers on his books, a young lad of Indian descent called Jimmy MacGregor, a student called Quentin Hickmott, and Omar Thompson – whom he’d actually worked with briefly before both were made redundant – Tam formed a boy band called the C-U Jimiz. The C-U Jimiz did covers of boy-band numbers, and because each of them in their own way was

attractive, they were remarkably popular at teenage discos, pub evenings, and especially with hen nights, after which needless to say the four unattached young males were invariably in considerable demand. Even Tam himself sometimes benefited – there was often someone older, perhaps an office colleague or even a mother, present as well – although for the most part Tam’s finest years as a sex object had passed.

The internet was also proving a fruitful source of talent and Tam scoured YouTube and other for any local bands who recorded themselves. A year after forming the C-U Jimiz, he took on a small amateur Edinburgh band who had recorded themselves in a home-made studio – an arrangement which at first proved chaotic until Tam combined them with his new boy band. It was a success of sorts – but not for Tam himself, who accidentally upset some of the Falkirk locals in the process and made it clear that if he stayed around to collect any money due to him, his very life might be in danger. One night, on the brink of his greatest triumph, he suddenly decided to disappear – indeed it was agreed all round that if it was best if he simply did just ‘disappear’, Tam himself being given some input into the decision. His enemies even gave him enough money for a one-way ticket to somewhere in the Middle East, plus a small compensation for his loss of earnings from *Any Way You Want Me*. Anything to get rid of him without fuss.

And amazingly, Tam did exactly as he was told. No one ever saw him again in his native land, and although strange rumours of a very small man in cuban heels were occasionally to be heard, that was as far as it got. Tam and his song became a footnote in history, a pub-quiz question too obscure even for Trivial Pursuit. It was a bit of shame, really, because even although he could be utterly untrustworthy and irritating, almost everyone he met gained from the experience; only Tam failed to prosper.

Then... many years later, something strange happened: a small firm based in Malawi called Little Tones latched onto the market for ringtones for mobile phones. The firm's office and factory converted music of all styles, and proved to have a magical talent for finding music that would make brilliant ringtones – it's not as easy as you'd think – and furthermore it gained fame across the country for employing pygmies, amongst whom the unemployment rate was especially high because of job discrimination. The Malawi government was delighted. Not as delighted as the firm's owner, however, who had realised that selling ringtone downloads for just fifty pence per tone was a sales winner: people just bought them, used them for a bit, then bought another. Little was known of the strange reclusive owner although it was understood that he, too, was a pygmy, although not a local one. In addition, the owner also let it be known that his own favourite ringtone – and by far the most profitable one for Little Tones – was a version of *Any Way You Want Me You Can Have Me*.

Any Way You Want Me, You Can Have Me

Quick ♩ = 132

Thomas Cantlay

Chorus

An - y way you want me you can have me, Take me as you want me, I don't care,

An - y way you want me You can have me Ba - by, when you want me ba - by,

I'll be there.

No mat - ter if you're feel - ing cold and grey,
Have what you want with a wave of your hand

No mat - ter what you need to make your day No mat - ter if you're ma - ny miles
What takes your fan - cy I will un - der - stand, Just say it ba - by, I'm at your

a - way, I can be by your side An - y way you want me you can have me,
com - mand, You can have all you need

Take me as you want me, I don't care, An - y way you want me You can have me

Ba - by, when you want me ba - by, I'll be there. An - y way you want me

you can have me, Take me as you want me, I don't care, An - y way you want me

You can have me Ba - by, when you want me ba - by,

Ba - by, when you want me ba - by, Ba - by, when you want me ba - by, I'll be there.