



Hollering from the wily, raucous mecca of Winnipeg, Manitoba, the band that would become The Guess Who had its roots in a series of garage rock groups fronted by vocalist Chad Allan dating back to 1958. The band enjoyed local success first as The Silvertones and then as The Reflections, and finally as Chad Allan & The Expressions, when in 1962 their cover of Johnny Kidd & The Pirates' "Shakin' All Over" became a No. 1 hit in Canada. Released at the height of the British invasion, the group's label, Quality Records, issued the single with the credit billed as "Guess Who?" in an attempt to build a mystique around the song by suggesting that it was actually performed by a British group (spoiler). After the track became a hit, Quality revealed that it was in fact by Chad Allan & The Expressions, but radio DJs continued to refer to the group as The Guess Who, as the band (wanting to capitalize on their newfound notoriety) took the new name. Despite their success, by the summer of the following year, Allan, who was beset by vocal problems, departed the group to enroll in university, leaving 18-year-old keyboardist Burton Cummings as the band's lead vocalist. Cummings, along with guitarist Randy Bachman, bassist Jim Kale and drummer Gerry Peterson would crystallize the lineup that would find even greater fame in the years to come.

The group released a series of top-40 singles in Canada through 1966 and into early 1967, but a disastrous trip to England early that year almost ended the band. When the single "No Girl" became a minor hit on the British charts, the band was lured overseas under promises of a lucrative new deal by their British label. Arriving in the country, they were presented with contracts they deemed too onerous to sign, and without work visas they were unable to promote the single, which dropped out of the UK charts after only a week. Suffering a heavy setback to Canada to lick their wounds, the band found themselves over \$20,000 in debt. Salvation would arrive in the unlikely form of a CBC television show called *Let's Go*, a weekly music programme aimed at teenagers. Headed by the show's house band, The Guess Who performed near-perfect sound-alikes of the chart hits of the day, and eventually their own music as well. Not only did the show afford the band national exposure, their two-year run on the programme allowed them to pay off all the debt they'd incurred.

Amongst the viewers of *Let's Go* was Jack Richardson, a former McCallum-Brisson ad executive and record producer who'd started his own production company, called Melius 9. Richardson had come up with an advertising project for the Canadian branch of Coca-Cola, where he'd produce and market an LP that Coke drinkers could redeem by mailing in bottle-top liners. With another popular Canadian act of the time, The Stooges (who'd soon change their name to The Five Man Electrical Band and have a hit single with "Signs") providing material for one side of the LP, Richardson signed up The Guess Who to provide the other side, which was released in early 1968 as *A Wild Pair*.

*A Wild Pair*'s success would mark the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship between Richardson and The Guess Who. In its immediate wake, Richardson bought the band's contract from Quality Records

for \$1000 and took out a second mortgage on his house to fund the recording of their RCA debut album, *Winefield Soul*, which was released in March 1969. Richardson's financial gamble was rewarded when the album was a success, thanks largely to the million-selling Top-10 single "These Eyes." The band quickly followed up with their September sophomore release, *Cassid Whoot*, which spawned two more hit singles, "Laughing" (US No. 10, Canada No. 1) and "Shakin'" (US No. 22, Canada No. 2). As successful as 1969 was for the group, it was to be just a prelude to the March 1970 release of their much harder-rocking third LP, *American Woman*. Preceded by the release of the single "No Time" (which would hit No. 3 in the US and No. 1 in Canada) in February, it was the double A-side release of *American Woman/No Super Tonight* that would take The Guess Who to the top of the charts in both the US and Canada in May. Not only did the single put the group in the record books as the first Canadian act ever to reach No. 1 in the *Billboard* Hot 100, it also pushed *American Woman* all the way to a crown-king No. 9 in the US album charts.

Just as the group was reaching the apex of its US popularity, storm clouds were forming behind the scenes. Bachman, whose close-knit marriage Marjorie had put him at odds with the rest of the band, further strained relations when he released a solo album, *Jan*, in March 1970. Sidelined by a bout of acute gall bladder attacks that spring, Bachman returned home for treatment while the band fulfilled its touring commitments, deputizing teenage guitar sensation Bobby Sabatino as his temporary replacement. When the band and Bachman reunited on 15 May 1970 in New York for a gig at the Fillmore East, a furious hotel room war ensued. Under the impression that Bachman had been in New York for a week (Bachman claims it was just a day) taking care of his business affairs while they were touring, they accused him of putting his own interests ahead of the group. The argument culminated in a "you can't fire me, I quit!" moment and Bachman was out of the band — the date of his departure ironically exactly halfway through *American Woman*'s three-week run at No. 1.

Most bands would have been staggered by the departure of a key songwriter and lead guitarist, but The Guess Who performed open heart surgery on itself without skipping a beat, finding closure in popular Winnipeg underground bands Brother, who provided Kurt Winter, and Wild Dog, who provided Greg Isaacs. Winter's addition in particular proved a real boon to the band — not only was he a ferociously unique lead guitarist, he was also a supremely talented songwriter. Now lineup in place, The Guess Who released their second album of 1970, *Share the Land*, in October. The record continued the band's hot streak, yielding Canadian and US Top-40 hits in the Winter-penned "Rudie" (and "Don't Stop Believin'" by the Guess Who/Winter collaboration) along on "Four Lads", as well as the title track, written by Cummings. One of the new lineup's first gigs was also one of its most high profile — invited at the request of Richard Nixon's youngest daughter Tricia, the band played a White House reception for Prince Charles and Princess Anne on 17 July 1970.

songwriting from Cummings and Winter (both separately and in collaboration) would power the band through much of the next two years, beginning with the non-LP single *Albert Flower/Broken* (another top-40 hit both sides of the border) in March 1971, quickly followed by the full-length *So Long*. *Romya* in July, which yielded the US Top-20 (and Canada No. 3) hit *Rain Snow*. Leslie would depart shortly after the release of February 1972's *Beatin'*, with Winnipeg-area guitarist Dennis McDougall replacing him in time for the May gigs that produced live of *The Porcupine*, whose No. 39 position in the US album charts was the band's best since *Show the Land*. A testament to the group's undiminished appeal as a concert draw, the album also generated a minor US hit (Top 10 in Canada) in *Rainin' Back in Saskatoon*. By the time live of *The Porcupine* was on store shelves, however, the group had endured another lineup change, with Leslie (in Kaine replaced by Bill Wallace (a bandmate from Ken Water's pre-Guess Who group, *Brother*) who joined in time for the July recording sessions for the band's next record, *Artificial Paradise*.

Released in January 1973, *Artificial Paradise* seemingly had everything going for it, with arguably the most instrumentally and vocally proficient lineup in the band's history, and its strongest collection of songs since *Show the Land*. The album was also the group's most democratic, with songwriting shared equally amongst all the bandmembers, and the lead work split almost evenly between Cummings and newcomers McDougall and Wallace. So when the album hit the charts with a thud – it would get no higher than No. 110 in the US album tally – band, management, producer and label were justifiably perplexed. Post-mortems on the LP have blamed everything from the obtuse cover design (which paralleled direct mail get rich quick schemes) to the group straying too far from its pop roots.

Recorded just weeks after *Artificial Paradise* cratered, late 1972's *110* chronicled the frustration and disappointments of a band trying to navigate the journey from AM popsters to FM album rockers. Bitchy but beautiful, the album found Cummings reasserting himself as the group's de facto leader, dominating its songwriting credits and singing all of its lead vocals. Unfortunately, Cummings' power move did nothing to steady the group's US chart decline, with the album registering a paltry No. 158 and its lone single, *Glamour Boy* (so beautiful Cummings plume belted undercut by lyrics that took a cynical stab at the nascent glam-rock genre) failing to chart at all. Despite their joggling commercial fortunes, the band remained a strong live draw throughout this period, touring nearly 10 months out of the year in both 1972 and 1973 – a somewhat ironic testament to the fact that the group was fielding its strongest musical lineup during its stormy struggle.

The band's hectic schedule (along with interpersonal issues exacerbated by both substance and alcohol abuse) conspired to delay the release of the group's next album, *Real Food*, until April of 1974. In spite of that, the record proved to be a surprising return to form, with Cummings loosening his death grip on the songwriting credits and the band collectively tempering the more harrowing excesses of *110* with some of the pop sensibilities of their earlier years. Not only did the album reach No. 63 in the US charts

(the band's best showing in nearly three years), it also produced a US Top-40 hit (and top 10 in Canada) in the power-pop stomper *Star Baby* and a genuine Top 10 smash (their first since 1970) in the novelty hit *Clap for the Wolfman*, which featured guest vocals from legendary radio DJ Wolfman Jack.

By the time *Clap for the Wolfman* became a hit in the summer of 1974, the tensions within the band had taken their toll, with Winter seceded and McDougall following him out the door in protest. In their stead the band recruited Toronto-area guitarist Dominic Tolson (who'd played in seminal Canadian rock outfits *Monsters* and *Rush* before replacing Joe Walsh in *The James Gang*) and returned with *Flowers in October* of that year. The record would yield the band's final Top-40 single, *Dance! Feet!*, and spawn one further album, July 1975's *Power in the Music*, but Cummings (who felt that Tolson's jazz-fusion allegiance had caused the band to lose its way) finally called time on the group in favour of a solo career before the year was out.

*Wheatfield Soul* may technically be The Guess Who's fourth album, but the changes the band had undergone since its previous long player, 1966's *It's Time*, were so seismic that it almost feels like the debut LP of an entirely new band. The first, and most apparent, was the departure of original lead vocalist Chas Allen, and his subsequent replacement with Burton Cummings, who'd been the group's keyboardist to that point. But it was the events following Allen's departure, namely the burgeoning songwriting partnership between Cummings and Randy Bachman, and the beginning of the group's long association with producer Jack Richardson, that truly inform the sound and substance of *Wheatfield Soul*. The Bachman-Cummings alliance would yield no less than 8 of the album's 10 tracks (with the two principals each contributing a solo composition as well), while Richardson's talents as a producer – and keen ear for a hit – would take the group from garage rock obscurity to the upper reaches of the US pop charts in the spring of 1968 with the album's first single, *These Eyes*.

While *These Eyes* provided the kind of radio-ready hit single that put the band on the commercial map, the rest of the album is markedly different. Awash in psychedelia, its retrograde it reveals a band experimenting with style and sonic texture in search of a direction. At times the album veers its influences a little too earnestly on its claims, as with the tentative long Doors homage *Friends of Mine* and *Apple Ridge* (which recalls the music hall in a perhaps minor vein of the Beatles' *Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!*), but more often than not the fledgling through originality shines through. Cummings' *I Found Her in a Bar* is a fine pop song that benefits from a Ben McPeak string and horn arrangement, while the dourly belted *A Wilderness in Your Garden* turns along thanks to some jazzy brushwork from drummer Gerry Peterson.

The album finds half of its most overtly psychedelia on *Love and a Yellow Rose*, where moored vocal chanting gives way to a middle section where Bachman's electric cello duels with Cummings' keyboards. The album is also notable for being one of the only instances where the group collaborated with outside writers – in this case Bob DiPietro, a guitar student and friend of Bachman's whose poetry formed

the lyrical basis for the song *Lightfoot* (a tribute to Canadian Lightfoot, one of Cassady's most beloved musical icons) and the riff-variant *When Ten Tock Me*. Closing out the album is the jerry *We're Coming to Dinner*, a "fathers, lock up your daughters" track that skirts the boundary (both lyrically and musically) between interesting and intriguing. The album may not have the consistency of their later work, but for fans of the band it's a fascinating insight into its early evolution, and a relic of a time when record labels gave their acts the space to evolve rather than force group them into conformity.

*Wheatfield Soul* may have failed to produce a second single following *Three Eyes*, but that was of seemingly little concern to all involved because in July 1969, less than two weeks after *Three Eyes* hit its chart peak, the group released the newly-reissued double A-side single *Laughing/Union*. Reaching No. 18 in the US pop charts, *Laughing* was the more commercially successful of the two songs, but *Union* (which has gone on to become one of Beckerman's most beloved compositions), with its jerry chord inversions and stark output matter arguably did more for the group's artistic credibility, setting the stage for their successes in the following years.

Both *Laughing* and *Union* appeared on the band's second RCA EP, *Corned Wheat* (a clever pun on the name of *Going Up the Country* reissues *Corned Beef*) which hit store shelves in September 1969, barely five months after *Wheatfield Soul*. If that album had been somewhat guilty of bowing to the whim of a board sounding like its influences on its debut, *Corned Wheat* did anything but adhere to the rock and roll stereotype of the difficult second album.

With the decks cleared of other material on *Wheatfield Soul*, *Corned Wheat* sees Beckerman and Cummings fully hit their stride as collaborators and song-writers, a development readily apparent from the first notes of the album opening track *Ma Fiancé*. With its cooing melody, fuzz-drenched riffs and muted vocal harmonies, the song (like the rest of the album) finds all the hallmarks of the classic *Queen Who* sound firmly in place. It's followed in sequence by the melancholy ballad *Midwest Boy* and then *Laughing*, which aired the same vein of blue-eyed soul as *Three Eyes* did earlier in the year in similar commercial success. The two jazzy Beckerman-penned tunes, *Union* and *6 A.M. or Moore*, yield some of Cummings' finest recorded flute playing, while the gospel-inflected *Old Joe* sees the group adding a new wrinkle to its sound. A return to more familiar climes follows with the peppy rock-roller *Oh a Dropping Pin* and the extended psychedelia workout *Key*, which affords Gerry Peterson a chance for a lengthy drum improvisation. The album's closer (and only misstep, depending on who you ask) is *Not Warning*, which finds Cummings adopting a heavy Scottish brogue to deliver tongue-in-cheek monologue about the pitfalls of love, backed by some hoity (and straining) from Beckerman.

When RCA became the first major label to announce support for the new 4-channel quadraphonic format with a glibly two-page colour centrefold in the 28 November 1970 issue of *Billboard* magazine, it was no surprise that as the label's (and reportedly the country's) best-selling act, The *Queen Who* featured

prominently. Both *Wheatfield Soul* and *Corned Wheat* (along with the band's two subsequent albums, *American Woman* and *More for Love*) were part of this initial release of 70 quadraphonic 8-track tapes, joining label heavyweights like Eric Presley, Jack Pellerone and Henry Mancini in being some of the first mainstream artists released in the new format. These early quad mixes are also the source of another interesting footnote in quad history: they inspired John Lennon to mix his solo ones, including, in quad. According to Apple A&R man Alan Douglas, "John was initially reluctant to mix in quad, but immediately became enthusiastic about it after we played a *Queen Who* recording for him." Lennon would later call the experience "brussels!" (but despite his approval, and the best efforts of RCA, quad never took off and little over five years later the label axed the programme. Rescued from the original tapes, this SACD release marks the first time these historic quad mixes (which never even made the jump to good LP) have been available in any form in nearly four decades, and they're joined by their stereo counterparts, which also make their worldwide high-resolution debut as part of this package.

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