

# So Mr McCartney, have you ever met the Rubettes? Alan Williams speaks to The Edinburgh Reporter



Yesterday, the Reporter spoke to music legend Alvin Stardust ahead of Saturday's 'Rewind to the Seventies' concert at the Assembly Hall, and today we hear from another star of the show, Alan Williams, the lead singer of the Rubettes.

The Rubettes shot into the charts on 4 May 1974 with the unforgettable 'Sugar Baby Love' which not only overtook Edinburgh's Bay City Rollers' 'Shang-a-Lang' but quickly knocked Abba's Eurovision Song Contest winner 'Waterloo' off top spot. The song captured the imagination of the public and became the country's biggest ever debut hit selling an incredible three million records worldwide. As well as being hugely popular in the UK, the band were massive in Europe and France in particular where 'Sugar Baby Love' remains the one of the top selling singles of all time. It stayed at Number One for four weeks fighting off competition from top acts such as The Osmonds, Stevie Wonder, Wizzard, David Bowie, Status Quo, Cliff Richard and a certain Alvin Stardust, before novelty song 'The Streak' by Ray Stevens took over.

Their iconic status in France was unprecedented as a certain Sir Paul McCartney found out at the time, and their popularity has not diminished to this day. Alan explains: "We actually have had more hits in France than the UK. The French seem to like many of the songs which appeared on B sides of our UK hits, and when 'Sugar Baby Love' was released, it sold two million copies in France which was a record number.

"In 1977 we were supporting Wings and got talking to Paul McCartney back stage. At the time he had just bought an island off the coast of Scotland, and he told us that when he had been interviewed in France, the first question was 'Are you Paul McCartney from the UK?' the second was 'Do you know the Rubettes?' He couldn't believe it, but that's how big we were.

"We probably perform more on the continent than in the UK at the moment, and have a massive concert featuring seven or eight bands in Antwerp in December which we are all really looking forward to."

The Rubettes' next hit 'Tonight' reached number 12 then 'Juke Box Jive' made number three behind Barry White's 'You're the first, the last my everything' and Mud's 'Lonely this Christmas,' although this remains a small bone of contention with the band who believe that they outsold both songs, but since the beneficiary was their old pals Mud, they hold no grudges: Alan recalls: "Juke Box Jive got to number three then we outsold the records above us, but for some reason we went down to number ten then the following week we shot back up the charts. Our record company put in a complaint but since it was Mud and dear old Les (Gray) then I suppose it's OK."

In all, the band had 15 worldwide hits including 'I can do it,' 'Baby I know' 'Little Darling' and Alan's personal favourite 'Foe Dee o Dee.' In 1994, the iconic Australian movie 'Muriel's Wedding' opened with 'Sugar Baby Love' which introduced the band to a younger audience.

Alan is looking forward to the show although for a period, touring with the bank lost some of its appeal, but he insists that the enthusiasm has returned and no-one will be disappointed: "I will be arriving in Edinburgh on Friday along with John the drummer and Nick Clarke and I am sure it will be a fantastic evening. This is our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but if you

had told us told when we started that we would have lasted five years I'd have said that you were mad.

"It's always nice to reproduce the old image so we will be in our white suits, although they may not be the same ones we wore back then with the 23 inch hips, and we will be playing most of our hits including 'Sugar Baby Love' 'Tonight' 'Juke Box Jive' 'I can do it' 'Foe Dee o Dee' 'Baby I know' and many more. We've been playing so long that I tend to forget that some fans who have seen us on TV or heard us on the radio and like our songs haven't seen us live, so Saturday is an opportunity to rectify that.

"Most of us have been on the road for such a long time that it becomes second nature, and everyone goes through a period where they get a bit fed up playing the same old songs night after night, but I think when you get into your sixties, as all of us are, you get, not quite a new lease of life, but something like that and you are amazed at how much energy you put into a performance.

"I've been to Edinburgh before, playing the Usher Hall with the Rubettes and other venues as part of the 70s tour with Showaddywaddy and Sweet and have visited the Castle. I love Scotland, in fact I spent New Year's Eve in Stirling two years ago where there was a Ceilidh band and I ended up with blisters on my feet from the dancing."

On a more serious note, all proceeds from the event will go to the National Autistic Society, and Alan was quick to pay tribute to the hard work done by the organiser Sue Wilson, before also revealing that one lucky member of the audience will be going home with a unique souvenir of the night. He continued: "I first met Sue who has organised the show, five or six years ago in Belgium and we have done a couple of shows for her since then. She does great work and is tireless, whereas we just do what we can. On Saturday, I will be raffling a fender guitar which Alvin, Dave Hill and Don Powell

from Slade and us will have signed, so hopefully that will raise some more money for the cause.”

The Rubettes have always been a ‘live’ band and toured extensively thrilling audiences wherever they went and are now firmly established in history as Icons of Rock n’Roll.

The show is on at the Assembly Hall at 1930 on Saturday night.