

Track Notes from Neil Diamond:

1. Forever In Blue Jeans — “Forever in Blue Jeans” was inspired by guitarist Richard Bennett’s wonderful opening guitar lick which he first played for me while we were out on the road. That guitar lick was so seductive that the melody I started singing over his guitar practically wrote itself. When we returned to L.A. we were anxious to get into the studio and put the finished (we thought) song on tape. After running through it with my band a few times, we all realised that we needed to add another musical section to make the record really work. We called a 15 minute break, right in the middle of the recording session, while Richard and I sat down at the piano and hashed out a brand new section with a lyric of its own (“Maybe tonight...”). This new, unplanned section (instantly orchestrated by arranger Tom Hensley) would become one of my favourite parts of the record. Necessity really did prove to be the mother of invention on this wonderful Bob Gaudio production.

2. Beautiful Noise — I remember Garth Hudson of The Band sitting at his huge self-built pipe organ and playing the solo of this record at the Beautiful Noise session. What he played completely floored us as he filled the musical track with an amazing sound that helped keep the record alive and interesting. Thank you Garth.

3. Love On The Rocks — “Love on the Rocks” was performed live for the cameras on the set of The Jazz Singer movie. This is something that’s hardly ever done in movies as they prefer to have the singer lip-sync the vocals of a pre-recorded track. All the songs in The Jazz Singer were done live because I’m terrible at lip-syncing.

4. Cherry, Cherry — Ellie Greenwich, Jeff Barry, Artie Butler and I made a fun little demo of “Cherry, Cherry” to use as a guide for an upcoming recording session of the song. We never could top that unpretentious, good feeling demo at the full session, so they ended up releasing the demo. It went top five in America and marked the true beginning of my career in music.

5. I Am...I Said — “I Am...I Said” took four months of writing day and night to complete. When the song was finally finished, a great Lee Holdridge string and horn chart was written and recorded. An immaculate Tom Catalano production completed this musical journey. It was nominated for a Grammy and still gives me chills when I perform it.

6. Sweet Caroline — “Sweet Caroline” was written in a Memphis hotel room the night before it was recorded. The next day I walked the song over to American Sound Studio and played it through for producer Tommy Cogbill and the studio house band (Reggie Young on guitar, Mike Leech on bass, Bobby Emmons on the Hammond B-3 organ, Bobby Woods on acoustic piano and Gene Chrisman on drums). This little group created the basic track of one of my biggest and most durable hits ever. Co-producer Tom Catalano then brought in arranger Charlie Calello who wrote the unforgettable string and horn charts (bah-bah-bah) which were recorded later in New York City. This record was an unexpected gift from the Gods of music. One that made us all look so good, so good, so good!

7. Cracklin’ Rosie — While chatting with a Canadian fan one day I was told the story of an Indian tribe on a reservation in Canada which had a deficit in the number of women. This meant that those unfortunate single men would buy an inexpensive bottle of wine called Crackling Rosé to keep them company on Saturday nights. This wine would become their date for the evening and they called her

Cracklin' Rosie. That was all the story I needed to hear to write this song. It ended up being my first #1 record as an artist. For a recording artist there is no bigger thrill.

8. Play Me — We discovered during its recording session that “Play Me” didn't feel quite right in the 4/4 time signature that I had written it in. Guitarist Richard Bennett came up with the solution by playing his guitar picking lick in 3/4 time. This new time signature made all the difference in the world as the song settled into its own natural feel. I thanked Richard for pointing me in the right direction by giving him my beloved Everly Brothers acoustic guitar on the spot. He returned it to me years later knowing how much I missed it. That guitar now resides at the Grammy museum in Los Angeles.

9. I'm A Believer — I don't remember too much about writing or recording “I'm a Believer.” At the time it was just another one of the songs I had written for my second album on Bang Records. I do remember though, the Monkees recording it and taking it to #1 on the charts and it becoming the biggest selling single of the year. It's hard to forget stuff like that.

10. Girl, You'll Be A Woman Soon — This was my love song to all the screaming teeny-boppers at my early shows.

11. Holly Holy — Tommy Cogbill produced the basic tracks of “Holly Holy” in Memphis with the super-hot American Sound Studio house band. When co-producer Tom Catalano and I hand carried the boxes of recording tape through the Memphis airport to L.A. the next day, we held them like they were newborn babies because we both felt there was a miracle on those tracks. When we got back to L.A., Tom brought in arranger Lee Holdridge who was inspired enough by the tracks to write the most magnificent string and choral parts. When engineer Armin Steiner played it back all together, we knew we had somehow captured lightning in a bottle. This was a once in a lifetime recording experience for me.

12. Solitary Man — “Solitary Man” was a first for me in many ways. My first chart record as an artist, my first recorded performance with great professional musicians, the very best engineers, and two producers at the top of their game, Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich. These elements together made my first important musical introduction to the public one that I was thrilled to put my name on.

13. Song Sung Blue — I wish I could remember who played that electric piano riff on the opening of this record. I still love it. Also, it was my second #1 record as an artist.

14. You Don't Bring Me Flowers — This song was written at the request of television producer Norman Lear. He wanted it used as a theme song for a new “male-female role reversal” TV sitcom called All That Glitters (why else would a guy be singing about not getting flowers?). Marilyn and Alan Bergman and I wrote the lyric first and then I went off to set it to music. It didn't take long, the lyric was written to be sung. The song itself begged to be a duet and eventually my friend Barbra Streisand heard it and agreed. My third #1 single was shared with my favourite girl singer. What fun!

15. Hello Again — Alan Lindgren and I wrote this song at drummer Dennis St. John's beach pad in a smoky haze of good fellowship.

16. Red, Red Wine — “Red, Red Wine” was recorded for Bang Records in 1967. Soon afterwards, I left the Bang Records label. After I left, the people at Bang began to release everything I had ever recorded while I was with them, whether it was complete or not. They decided to throw in some violins to the very understated track I did for “Red, Red Wine” and then released it. I didn’t like their version very much but I swallowed it and moved on. Years later the group UB40 released the song in a terrific reggae version. The fact that UB40’s record went to #1 on the charts helped soothe my hurt pride. #1 records have a way of making all the hurt go away.

17. If You Know What I Mean — This is one of my favourite songs from the Beautiful Noise album. Robbie Robertson did a masterful job of producing this entire album.

18. Brother Love’s Traveling Salvation Show — This very unique record (produced by Tommy Cogbill and Chips Moman) was another Memphis creation (circa 1969). Bobby Woods on piano and Mike Leech on bass led me and the band to the promised land with this track. “Brother Love” was a very odd single (you couldn’t dance to it because of all the tempo changes) but it caught on nonetheless. Almost immediately, it became one of my favourite songs to perform live and remains my show closer after more than forty years. Now that’s what I call longevity!

19. Pretty Amazing Grace — “Pretty Amazing Grace” is one of the offspring of my two Rick Rubin produced albums, 12 Songs and Home Before Dark. I familiarised the band in the studio with it by having us practice the instrumental guitar section that can be heard about three quarters of the way through. Once we got that part down, the rest of the tune just fell into place. Of course it takes great musicians to make things just “fall into place.” I was lucky to have them and a great producer on those sessions.

20. Kentucky Woman — I wrote “Kentucky Woman” in an old limo that I had just purchased from a funeral home to carry me through a touring version of Dick Clark’s Where the Action Is T.V. show. It was my very first tour and I didn’t know exactly what to expect so I prepared myself to do a lot of writing in transit. My keyboard player Max Sandler drove that ’57 Cadillac limo as I sat in the roomy back seat cradling my guitar and writing songs throughout that entire thirty-two city, twenty-eight day tour. This song was started as we approached our play date in Paducah, Kentucky.

21. Shilo — “Shilo” set a higher lyrical standard for me than anything I had written before on Bang Records because it had a little story to tell. I wanted this record out as a single and Bang Records did not. They offered to release it if I were willing to re-sign with them for another two years. I refused, believing that I had earned the right to choose my own single after all the success we’d had. I finally left Bang and my producers Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich over this song. I don’t regret it and I guess it turned out okay in the end but I’ll always miss the excitement of those Bang Years.

22. America — For me, the song “America” provided the heart and soul of The Jazz Singer film. The satisfaction I felt from popularising that song made the reviews I got as an actor sting a little less.

23. Hell Yeah — This self-revelation poured out of me as the last of the thirty songs I had written for contention in my 12 Songs album. “Hell Yeah” is an affirmation of a lifetime spent devoted to music and my attempt to find a personally satisfying life for myself beyond the music. I have that life now but it was a much harder job than I thought possible. Still, well worth all the years and all the tears. I wish I could personally thank the hundreds of musicians, arrangers, and engineers who, along with

the producers, spent long days and nights in studios around the country to make these recordings vibrate and thrill. As a songwriter I can only humbly bow down and thank them all from the depths of my heart for giving wings to my dreams. —Neil Diamond