

Ray Davies

"see my friends"

Introduction

Ray Davies is one of rock's elder statesmen. August 2014 marks 50 years since his band The Kinks had their first hit record.

Still friends with people he went to school with, Ray Davies lives only a mile away from Muswell Hill where he grew up. He may occasionally be seen walking up the road, or in a café drinking a cup of tea. At once ordinary and extraordinary, Ray Davies is quite possibly Britain's greatest songwriter.



From left to right: Dave, Sister Gwen, Ray (standing), niece Jackie.

Raymond Douglas Davies grew up in a large family in Fortis Green during the post-war period of the 1950s. These were hard times and London lacked some basic necessities but Ray remembers his childhood fondly as sunny and bright with plenty of space to play and enough to eat. With younger brother Dave he learned to play music, inspired and influenced by the black American blues of Big Bill Broonzy, Muddy



Fortis Green

Waters and John Lee Hooker. His older sisters had boyfriends who brought their own records to the house; romantic war-time songs, big-band music and a variety of other sounds. It was a magical education for the young Ray Davies.



6 Denmark Terrace - The Davies family home

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Athenaeum ballroom,
Muswell Hill

Encouragement and Initiation

For his 13th birthday Ray was presented with a Spanish guitar by his sister Rene.

He had been admiring it for a while in the Les Aldrich Music shop on Fortis Green Road. Rene loved music and especially loved to dance. Later that same day and against her doctor's advice she went out to the

difficult to think of a song with a more heart-rending backstory. It is an indication of just how deeply personal the songs of Ray Davies are.



Fortis Green Road,
Muswell Hill



William Grimshaw School 1956

Ray attended William Grimshaw School (now Fortismere) in Muswell Hill, and after school he practised his guitar, taking lessons from his brother-in-law. From 1962 -1963 Ray completed a foundation year at Hornsey College of Art. He then enrolled on a theatre design course at Croydon College of Art. Working Class culture was

becoming fashionable in the visual art world, but Ray was more interested in music. He began playing guitar and harmonica in a West

Indian rhythm and blues band in Soho. Dave Davies had already formed a band with their school friend and bass guitarist Peter Quaife, when Ray returned home to join them.

In December 1960 the Davies brothers played their first proper gig together at the Clissold Arms public house, opposite where they lived in Fortis Green. Although not yet called The Kinks, this was the inaugural public performance by the core of the band. They played an instrumental by Ray, which would later form the basis of *Tired of Waiting for You*, one of their many hits. Various gigs followed including a residency at the Athenaeum ballroom in Muswell Hill Broadway.

Lyceum ballroom in the West End, where she suddenly collapsed and died on the dance floor. Many years later Ray would write *Come Dancing* in memory of his sister. It is



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Inspiration and Arrival

Former 'Teenage Rage' singer Larry Page was engaged as the band's manager.

He had confidence in their energy and recognised Ray's song-writing ability. They signed to the Pye record label in 1964 as The Ravens but they were swiftly steered towards a 'kinky' appearance and name change. Page thought calling them 'Kinks' suggested sexual ambiguity and would gain them attention and notoriety; something he himself had been good at in the 1950s. So, The Kinks they became.

The Kingsmen's version of Richard Berry's Jamaican ballad *Louie Louie* was an unexpected hit in early 1964. The relaxed vocal style with a throbbing guitar probably gave Ray greater confidence about his own style of vocal melody, as Dave Davies recalls they played the record constantly for a time. An Elpico 'little green amp' bought



locally and used by Ray and Dave for practice, featured significantly in the development of The Kinks' sound. Well-schooled in jazz and blues, Ray came up with the opening notes to *You Really Got Me* on the piano, which Dave developed into an inspirational crude, metallic riff on his guitar. He then slashed the speaker cone and turned up the volume to deliver a rather dirty but curiously engaging sound. It was the invention of 'heavy metal' and it did not exist anywhere else in 1964.

You Really Got Me was The Kinks' third single and a last chance with Pye. Ray's confident vocals and Dave's bold, jagged guitar sound fired the public's imagination. It reached the top of the charts in the UK and later the top ten in the USA. The Kinks simply took off and proceeded to deliver a string of hit singles.



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Determining Direction

A brief visit to India during an Asian tour in 1965 shaped Ray's song *See My Friends*.



From left to right: Ray Davies, Dave Davies, Peter Quaife and Mick Avory

The lyrics seem to allude to the death of a loved one and it was the first western popular song to incorporate an Indian Raga. Others were listening carefully to Ray's original ideas and a couple of months later The Beatles brought out *Norwegian Wood* featuring a sitar.

Like many bands, The Kinks were driven by a sibling dynamic that increasingly turned to hostility. Being really only interested in receiving validation as a songwriter, Ray tended to withdraw from public attention. Dave by contrast embraced fame with outrageous gusto. They fought constantly, often on stage, making life miserable for other band members. As a consequence The Kinks found themselves banned

from performing in the USA for over four years during the 1960s. It was the time of the 'British Invasion' and they were effectively cut off from the main rock music market. Ray recounts drummer Mick Avory summing up the reason for the ban as 'a mixture of bad management, bad luck and bad behaviour'.

Ray proceeded to concentrate on writing sensitive songs that were largely populated by the characters he had observed in his suburban neighbourhood. From studying the guitar fingerwork of Chet Atkins to taking inspiration from the songs of another country music legend, Hank Williams, he pushed himself to continually expand his craft. Ray Davies was gaining a reputation for a particular type of songwriting sophistication.

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The Golden Age: 1966 to 1972

As Britain's 1960s economic boom turned into recession, Ray wrote the satirical song *Sunny Afternoon* which conveyed something of the general feeling of decay.

He ran the song by his father who liked it, not least because he could imagine himself singing it in the pub. It proved to be the biggest hit of 1966 and was sung by the England crowd at Wembley Stadium during the world cup final.

The Kinks music, having veered between being raucous and somewhat otherworldly, became

generally more introspective. From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s the singles and LPs were critically very successful but often failed commercially.

The band gained a reputation for songs and concept albums reflecting English culture and lifestyle, driven by Ray's observational writing. Albums such as *Face to Face*,

Something Else, *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*, *Arthur*, *Lola Versus Powerman and The Money-Go-Round, Part One* and *Muswell Hillbillies*, along with their accompanying singles, are considered among the most influential recordings of the period.

Kinks biographer Nick Hasted asserts that the 1967 single *Waterloo Sunset* is a song that 'still casts a spell'. Certainly it has remained an anthem for London, with the closing ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games seeing Ray Davies step out of a London taxi and sing the song to the world in celebration of our capital city.

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KONK



With a \$1m advance payment for a 5-album contract plus money from hits like *Lola*, Ray and Dave established Konk, a recording studio of their own in Hornsey in the 1970s.

The Kinks began recording full-time at Konk in 1973 for their project *Preservation: Acts 1 & 2*. Konk thereafter remained their main studio. The exterior of Konk features on the cover sleeve of albums *Give The People What They Want* (1981) and *State Of Confusion* (1983).

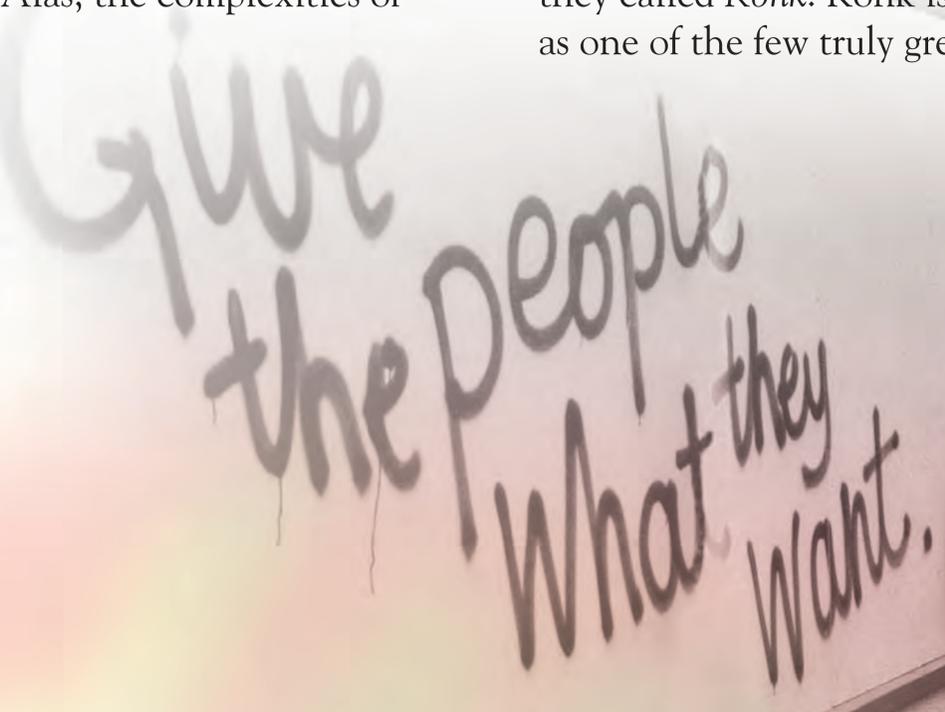
The Kinks launched their own record label which they also called Konk. Alas, the complexities of

commerce prevented it from being a major player but it carried a number of singles and LPs for a few short years in the 1970s. The Konk label still survives today in association with re-releases.

The Konk studio came to public attention again in 2008 when English indie rock group The Kooks recorded a No.1 album there, which they called *Konk*. Konk is regarded as one of the few truly great studios

left in London with a portfolio of major clients including Thin Lizzy, The Bee Gees, Depeche Mode, The Stone Roses and The Arctic Monkeys.

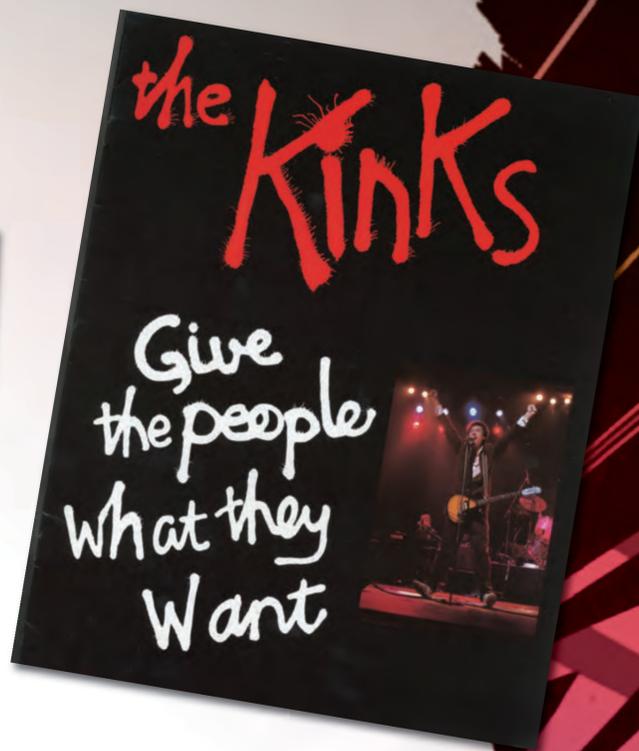
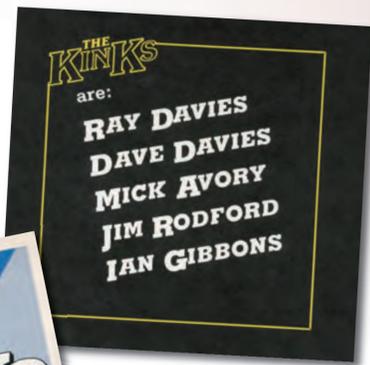
In recent months Konk has hosted a series of well-attended art exhibitions and is quietly establishing itself by providing North London with an unusual gallery space.



The Kinks outside Konk in 1981

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Live and Kicking

A switching of record labels from RCA to Arista in 1976 and the subsequent release of the straightforward rock album *Sleepwalker* saw The Kinks transform into a stadium rock band.

They packed venues across America and in 1981 sold out the prestigious Madison Square Garden.

Popular albums *Misfits*, *Low Budget*, *Give the People What They Want* and *State of Confusion* followed after. Mick Avory decided to leave the band in 1984 but top rock drummer Bob Henrit was able to take over. Groups such as The Jam and The Pretenders released cover versions of The Kinks' songs, increasing record sales. In the 1990s, Britpop bands Oasis and Blur named The Kinks as a major influence. Nonetheless the band ground to a complete halt. They played their last concert at the Norwegian Wood Festival in Oslo, in June 1996.

First Person Singular

Return to Waterloo was, technically speaking, Ray Davies' first solo album, released in 1985. The majority of his solo recordings have come since The Kinks ceased to exist as a band.

Ray released four albums between 1998 and 2009: *The Storyteller*, *Other People's Lives*, *Working Man's Café* (which gained greater airplay and reached a wider audience due to a promotional copy given away free with *The Sunday Times*), and the uplifting *The Kinks Choral Collection*.



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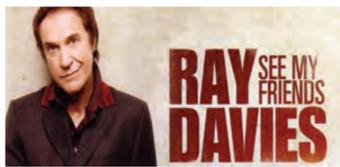
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Neighbours and Friends

The Kinks Choral Collection delivered a reworking of the milestone songs of Ray Davies, with the truly excellent Crouch End Festival Chorus.

Much of the album was recorded at Konk in 2009. It includes a suite of songs from the 1968 album *The Kinks Are The Village Green Preservation Society*, which was Ray Davies' homage to an idyllic and nostalgic England – not a bestseller at the time but now regarded by many as Ray's masterpiece. One of the most instantly striking songs on *The Kinks Choral Collection* is *See My Friends*. The arrangement with the choir magnifies the impact of the lyrics to make it feel like a gospel hymn.



highly successful album *See My Friends*, revisiting classic Kinks material in collaboration with Mumford & Sons, Paloma Faith, Matallica, and other major artists.

Sadly, the original Kinks bass player Peter Quaife died in 2010. Ray Davies and Mick Avory unveiled a

In November 2010 Ray Davies released the

commemorative plaque to Pete the following year at the north entrance to Fortismere School (formerly William Grimshaw).

There remains the tantalising possibility that The Kinks might reform with the three surviving original members. Ray has said they already have sufficient material for a couple of albums.

"I started *See My Friends* with a band, but I rearranged it after we'd finished recording it. In other words, I cut it up in the studio after it was recorded. It sounds brilliant! I'm really pleased with it, because it's an acapella version."

Ray Davies

Peter Quaife (left) with
Dave Davies



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Accolades

In the UK, The Kinks had seventeen Top 20 singles and five Top 10 albums.



They had five Top 10 singles on the US Billboard chart with nine of their albums charting in the Top 40. Four of their albums have been certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).

1990

The original four members of The Kinks: Ray Davies, Dave Davies, Peter Quaife and Mick Avory were inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, with Ray Davies identified as, "almost indisputably rock's most literate, witty and insightful songwriter."

"Being creative fires me up. I like to think that what I do with my song writing encourages other people to be creative..."

Ray Davies

2004

Ray Davies was awarded a CBE by Queen Elizabeth II, for 'services to music'.

2004

Ray Davies won the Mojo Songwriter Award, which recognises, 'an artist whose career has been defined by his ability to pen classic material on a consistent basis.'

2005

The Kinks were inducted into the UK Music Hall of Fame.

2006

Ray Davies received the Ivor Novello Award for 'Outstanding Contribution to British Music'.

2014

Ray Davies was inducted into the Songwriters' Hall of Fame.