

Barry Mason MBE.

A tribute compiled by Ken Scally

John Barry Mason MBE was a British singer and songwriter. A leading songwriter of the 1960s, he wrote the bulk of his most successful songs in partnership with Les Reed. Barry was born: July 12, 1935, at Spencer road, Wigan, Lancashire he died: April 16, 2021. Barry was active in the music business from: 1960 until 2020.

Barry Mason was the eldest son of Phyllis, née Hart, and journalist, Cecil Mason, who died when Barry was nine. He had a younger brother, Max, and two half-sisters, Lynn & Diane, by his mother's second husband. Barry grew up in the village of Coppull, near Chorley in Lancashire. After the death of his father, a Journalist on the Wigan Observer, his mother married an American soldier. Barry was sent to boarding school in Wales. He later attended Baines school in Poulton-Le-Fylde, Lancashire. By the time he had finished his national service in the Royal Marines, his mother and stepfather had emigrated to Columbus, Ohio, and Barry went to join them enrolled at Ohio State University but dropped out to try his luck in Hollywood. Barry recalled that, "I hitchhiked down Route 66 to Hollywood, to try to make my name as a singer or an actor." However, his California dream failed to materialise, and he returned to Britain. In 1961

Having failed to become a Hollywood star he returned to England and had a small role in Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, singing the song What Do You Want? The film starred Albert Finney, and Barry worked with him again as his understudy in the John Osborne play Luther at the Royal Court Theatre in London, an experience that convinced him he did not have what Finney had and would never make the grade as an actor.

Barry became a songwriter via management. His song writing credits included three UK Singles Chart, number ones. "Love Grows (Where My Rosemary Goes)," "The Last Waltz", and "I Pretend." His other hits were, "Here It Comes Again", "There Goes My First Love", "A Man Without Love", "Winter World of Love" "Now That You are Gone", "Rowbottom Square", "Love Is All", and "You Just Might See Me Cry" and of course the iconic Delilah. When Barry was just 15, He met a girl in Blackpool; she was on holiday. He fell head over heels in love. But at the end of her holiday, she revealed that it was over and that she had a boyfriend at home. Her name was Delia. "I was shattered," Mason recalled many years later. "I became sick with jealousy." Fast forward almost 20 years and Barry Mason was making a mark for himself as a songwriter, following abortive attempts to become an actor and a pop star.

Tom Jones had enjoyed a No 1 hit with "It's Not Unusual," written by Mason's friends Gordon Mills and Les Reed. Now Tom Jones needed more big songs to match his personality and Mason suddenly remembered his holiday fling and the pain he felt when his romantic hopes were so cruelly dashed. Inspired also by Bizet's opera Carmen and the Frankie Laine song Jezebel, he wrote a song of passion, jealousy and ultimately murder. "Why, why, why Delia" did not quite work, so Delia became Delilah. Mason wrote the lyrics, Reed the tune, Tom Jones had another huge hit, reaching No 2 in the singles chart in 1968, and Welsh rugby fans had a new anthem, until detractors suggested it encouraged domestic abuse banning it in 2015. Scottish rock icons, The Sensational Alex Harvey Band, also had a Top Ten hit with Delilah, accentuating the

theatre and melodrama of lines like "I felt the knife in my hand, and she laughed no more." The single reached No 7 in the U.K. charts 1975.



Barry Mason, left, Les Reed in the mid-1960s. Photograph: Pictorial Press Ltd/Alamy

His songs have been recorded by of course Tom Jones, Dalida, P. J. Proby, David Essex, The Drifters, Rod Stewart, Petula Clark, Perry Como, Elvis Presley, Engelbert Humperdinck, The Fortunes, Charles Aznavour, Tony Christie, Connie Francis, Mireille Mathieu, Barbra Streisand, The Dave Clark Five, Cliff Portwood, Malcolm Roberts, Our Kid and Ashley MacLaine.

Mason and Reed also wrote a song for Kathy Kirby, "I'll Try Not to Cry," as part of "A Song for Europe 1965," for the BBC's contest to choose the United Kingdom entry for that year's Eurovision Song Contest in Naples. The song was beaten by in the contest by "I Belong." "The Last Waltz" became a million-selling UK number one for Humperdinck in September 1967. In 1968, the duo scored another UK number 1 hit with Des O'Connor's recording of "I Pretend." their song "Here It Comes Again" was recorded by The Fortunes and reached No 4 in the UK and the Top 30 in the US. "Winter World of Love," the wistful "Les Bicyclettes de Belsize," and "Lonely is a man without love," were also recorded by Englebert. "There Goes My First Love," was a big hit for The Drifters. In 1976, Barry had two No 2 hits with, "Forever Has Gone by Demis Roussos" and "You Just Might See Me Cry," by Our Kid. Barry's "Girl of mine," was recorded on Elvis Presley's "Raised on Rock" album.

He was the major songwriter for the English singer Declan Galbraith for his first album *Declan* (2002), including the hit "Tell Me Why," (No. 29 in the UK and "Till the Day We Meet Again".

He founded his own publishing company, Barry Mason Enterprises Ltd.

Barry Mason was also a frequent guest on the BBC1 panel game *Pop Quiz*, hosted by Mike Read.

He was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2020 Birthday Honours for services to music.

Mason credits his start in song writing to his first hit in 1960 as a producer. "I met this boy called Tommy Bruce and I spent my last few pounds making a demo of him singing an old Fats Waller song, "Ain't Misbehaving," it was a hit which charted at No.3, in the UK, 1960. Suddenly,

I was his manager, not knowing anything about the business. But the important thing was, I was in the business."

Mason and Les Reed (who died almost exactly two years before Mason in April 2019) co-wrote the mega-hits "Delilah" and "The Last Waltz", while they also wrote "Marching on Together" also known as "Leeds! Leeds! Leeds!" the anthem of Leeds United F.C. Mason's last chart-topping song was "Love Grows (Where My Rosemary Goes)", for session group, Edison Lighthouse, in January 1970. Mason wrote for many other people over the years, from Tony Macauley to Michel Legrand, and most recently Charley Fosskett with whom he wrote five songs, including one pitched to Tom Jones.



Barry and Sir Tom image Daily Mail

Barry Mason was also a former "King Sod" of the SODS, the Society of Distinguished Songwriters, while he won five Ivor Novello Awards. He was also a prolific public performer of many solo shows for charity, usually with Don Gould (ex-Applejacks) on piano. He made his last appearance in February 2020 at a charity concert for prostate cancer at the Bull Theatre in Barnet which also starred singer/songwriters Steve Glen and Susan Black. The show was hosted by Song Link editor and good friend of Mason's David Stark, who commented:

"Barry was a great pal for almost thirty years and one of the nicest guys in the music business. A really humble, down to earth chap who I shared many laughs and memorable times with around the world. Together we travelled to judge song contests as far afield as Australia's Gold Coast, Malta, Romania, and other places. Wherever Barry went he would love to perform his hits if there was a pianist available, and often when there wasn't! Everyone loved to hear and see him performing "Delilah", "Love Grows", "The Last Waltz" and so many other hits. It's hard to believe he's no longer with us but I'm extremely proud to have hosted his final performance in 2020 just before the first lockdown kicked in."

Current King Sod Gary Osborne wrote, "It tears me apart to have to tell you that the beautiful heart of our much-loved Sod Barry Mason stopped beating at around 6.20 on April 16th. He'd been through three months of medical hell and wouldn't have survived even the first of those

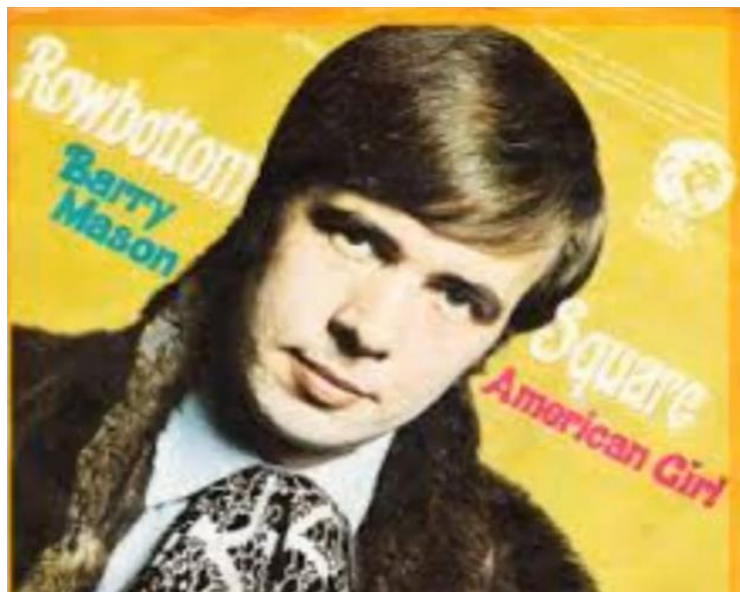
without the love of his beloved partner Vanessa. Nobody knew better than Barry that "lonely is a man without love." If I start to go on about him now, I might not be able to stop, so suffice it to say that I know he loved every one of us every bit as much as we loved him. Barry's heart may have stopped beating but his songs and his spirit will be with us forever, so as far as Barry Mason is concerned...the beat goes on. We shall not see his like again."

Spandau Ballet guitarist Gary Kemp made this tribute to Lancashire-born Barry Mason. He wrote: "I'm shocked to hear that my friend and lovely human being, Barry Mason died yesterday. A great songwriter who won five Ivor Novello Awards."

Singer Engelbert Humperdinck, posted a touching letter of memories including Mr Mason being groomsman at his wedding in 1964, Saying.

"I believe there are more than 90 of your songs in my recording history. Classics that I will treasure forever. I write this in the present as I can't believe you are gone. My sincere heartfelt condolences from my family to yours. Your long-time friend, Engelbert."

Barry's song Rowbottom square, features No 1 Rowbottom Square, Wigan. Where his sisters Lynn and Diane, owned Wigan's first Boutique. Miss Winkelman's. It was a must for the local trend setters.



Rowbottom Square. Barry Mason (MGM Records – MGM 1356-1967)

If you're alone tonight, lying there, losing your mind.
Call up a cab tonight, leave all your crying behind
Say: Mr. Cabby, now, I wanna go make the scene
He don't need no address, he's gonna know where you mean.

He'll drive you.
Up to square one, number one in Rowbottom Square
That's where the going is on
Number one in Rowbottom Square

This is the place to go, where would you likely go share.
The golden lights are low, Lynn and Diane will be there.
Music to blow your mind pouring all over the floor.
Won't be too hard to find, look for the home of your door.

Let's all go!
Back to square one, number one in Rowbottom Square
That's where the going is on
Number one in Rowbottom Square

References:

Brian Pendreigh of The Scotsman, Songlink international. Wikipedia. Archie Machin, the Daily Mail obituary. Wigan Today.