

## GARLAND JEFFREYS

"Here comes the One-Eyed Jack  
Sometimes White and sometimes Black"

**G**arland Jeffreys was born and bred in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, one of the many backyard communities that fringe Manhattan pretending to be the 'suburbs.' And, like any other lower-middle class kid growing up in the post-war era, he should have been wrapped in its blanket of smug optimism, nurtured by its confidence in the great future all would have part in.

But he was a child of many heritages . . . white, black, Puerto Rican . . . who learned early on the experience of trying to live in "many different worlds." Racially he wasn't welcomed as a 'brother' in the white, black or Puerto Rican worlds whose bases of acceptance were external. To survive he had to develop the facility to move through the entire racial spectrum.

"Much of the time I'm glad that I live and experience different worlds. It helps me understand people . . . feel what they go through just tryna' stay alive." It was precisely those feelings and that understanding that were translated into his first A&M album, *Ghost Writer*, a work the Village Voice called "the quintessential New York rock record (with) music so polished it threatens to turn street songs into art songs." That same threat, weaving his street savvy with his consummate skill and artistry, runs true in his new album, *One-Eyed Jacks*.

The Ink Spots, Ella Fitzgerald, Nat King Cole, Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra, Ray Charles, Charlie Parker: "These were my mother's favorites and fortunately I 'had' to listen to them too." It was not until Frankie Lymon came into Garland's life that rock 'n roll had any real significance: "Frankie was my idol. He was my size, a little 13-year-old kid with a fantastic voice. I loved 50's rock 'n roll. It was part of my life."

Through high school and college at Syracuse University, it was more of the same, more music, more influences, more experiences. His interest in the

Renaissance, its art, literature and language, enabled him to live in Florence for a year; more growth and more life to draw upon. How fortunate an opportunity, but this was not really what he wanted. "I still love Leonardo and Vermeer, but I'd always wanted to sing and now was the time for me to rekindle that desire.."

In 1966, he rejoined Lou Reed and Eric Burdon and a new friend, John Cale, at the Balloon Farm, and the following year began putting together his own band. In 1969, he founded Grinder's Switch and recorded his first album on Vanguard Records, *Grinder's Switch featuring Garland Jeffreys* (VSD-6550). In 1970, he launched his solo career: "I started playing in all the New York City clubs, and I do mean *all*. From Gerde's Folk City and the Bitter End to Max's and The Castaways.

Atlantic Records signed Garland to record his first solo album, *Garland Jeffreys* (SD 7253). The album, released in March 1973, was rapidly the recipient of rave reviews from Rolling Stone, The Village Voice, Crawdaddy, The New York Daily News, and the New York Times. In 1974, Garland recorded his "Wild in the Streets" single (ST-A-25 157SP), a song many consider an underground classic. It is included as well on *Ghost Writer*.

The following year, he was signed to Arista as the new label's first artist. The contract was mutually terminated after release of a poorly produced and conceived single "The Disco Kid" (AS 0119). Garland simply says, "I was signed into a singles deal, which was a mistake. When they were not willing to produce an album we were at an impasse. I have always known that I would have to pay a lot, be willing to sacrifice a lot to feel that I could legitimately call myself an artist. That is all I have ever wanted to be, and I have worked at it too many years to let any record company turn me into its current hype.."

(over please)

# Biography

Then in 1976, after retrenching once again, Garland Jeffreys signed a multi-year contract with A&M, a company, he says, "that has given me the room and allowed me the control to make the kind of record I can be proud of."

*Ghost Writer* received a stunning reception from the press. It was included on the Best Albums of 1977 lists of both the *L.A. Times* and *The Village Voice*. Said *Rolling Stone*: "This man's time has come, and he knows it." Robert Hilburn compared it to a "cross-town bus ride that allows glimpses of the confrontation, social unrest, joys and disappointments of the city . . . a bold, striking work." In the *New York Times*, John Rockwell referred to its "haunting lyrics . . . and compelling musical twists." *The New Yorker* took a ride with Garland after his performance at New York's Alice Tully Hall and translated the experience into an evocative narrative as he revisited scenes from his early years.

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*One-Eyed Jack* is dedicated to his childhood hero, the great Jackie Robinson, and of the album, Garland says "it expresses other dimensions, other sides of my personality." And as his longtime admirers are well aware, there appear to be an enormous number of facets to that complex and contradictory personality: Garland Jeffreys, the New York kid with heavy street smarts and the ability to translate the pulse of the streets into his work stands side by side with the cultured man who has a deep appreciation for art and literature. Garland the baseball fan is part and parcel of Garland, the student of Shakespeare.

When asked how he hopes *One-Eyed Jack* will be received, he says simply that he hopes people will be encouraged to listen. "I want the songs to be heard."

About that, there seems to be no doubt at all.