

## Ron Dann Told Me So

By Wray Ellis (published in Steel Guitar Magazine)



Ron Dann (left) and Wray Ellis, pictured right.

"I have a plan. I want you to play your bass and I will give you money." There was no trace of a smile on his face, until I tried to answer. "Of course!", I stammered - realizing that I had passed the audition. After exchanging phone numbers, he began a non-stop barrage of the funniest stories I'd ever heard. Tears were streaming down my face and I was helpless with laughter when without warning, he turned and left. That was my first contact with Ron Dann.

From that point on, I regularly got called to be in shows that Ron was putting together. It was not uncommon to hear this message on my answering machine: "I have a plan...Play your bass and I will give you money." That was always good enough for me. Just to be on the same stage with the players he chose was a thrill. His music charts and arrangements were flawless. When we would go on tour, his relentless sense of humour kept tensions down. And having dinner with Ron was an adventure. You could expect to have an extremely expensive dinner and wine - dry, red and plentiful.

The last thing I recall clearly about one particular night began with his trademark "I have a plan", he said pointing to the evening sky. From that moment on, we were on a crazy roller coaster ride from one of the finest restaurants in Toronto onto a succession of nightclubs, each welcoming us like celebrities. The wine flowed. The beer spilled. After a few hours of this, I had surpassed my limit. Bidding goodnight and stumbling toward the subway, I looked back and saw Ron sitting near the stage happily holding court over the eager musicians who had called intermission on our arrival.

We spoke frequently over the ensuing years as I struggled with a fledgling recording career, failed romance woes and the decision to go back to college and become a writer. He was the soul of wisdom and objectivity. Never judgmental. Ron had a way of restating problems in such a way that the solution became clear. These sessions, although intense learning experiences, would be laced with the driest wit and funniest lines. I couldn't wait to call him after hearing a story or joke that I knew he would appreciate.

I was flattered when Ron asked me to house-sit while he and Linda vacationed on the east coast.

For two weeks, I had use of the house, the car, his home studio. His record collection kept me busy for hours at a time. I played his British comedy videos until late in the night. I fought it as long as I could but I had to see who was in Ron's Rolodex. All the big names were sure to be there since he'd worked with them all. Carefully, I started flipping through the cards. It was a who's who of the music industry. Addresses and home numbers of the stars. And there, with Tyson, Lightfoot and Murray...was me! I was in the same file as some of Canada's biggest stars. When I read the note penciled on my card "Bassist / singer"...good God, I thought. Could he possibly know how much that means to me?

Here's a man never at a loss for a joke or a sympathetic ear. Here's a man who could take the most chaotic jazz lines, or life's biggest hurtles, and simplify them down to their most basic form.

My first attempts at writing were feeble but whatever I wrote, he read - always encouraging me. But, the most important lesson he taught me was how to deal with the ups and downs that go with living. Don't take things too seriously. Enjoy life while you can because it's short. Too short. And no matter what gets in your way, don't worry. You never know what opportunity is just around the next corner. I know it's true because Ron Dann told me so...every time he said, "I have a plan".