

# PHOENIX RISING...

**British musician John Verity has done the lot. The ever prolific former Argent frontman talks to Tim Slater about his latest solo project, his memories of touring with Jimi Hendrix...and his new signature Fret-King guitar.**

Songwriter, producer, singer, jobbing session guitarist...John Verity has been there, done it and got the T-shirt. As a man who entered the music business during the 1960s and is still very much at the sharp end, Verity has certainly enjoyed an fascinating career and is one of the most respected musicians of his generation. A professional musician since his teens, Verity has toured the world with and penned hit singles for Argent during the 1970s and also carved a successful parallel career as a busy session musician and independent record producer, clocking up studio time with Motörhead, Saxon, Ringo Starr and Colin Blunstone among many others. The down to earth Yorkshire-born musician (now based in Bedfordshire) is currently focused on his eponymous solo project that he takes on the road in the shape of a powerful and versatile rock band that includes fellow ex Argent drummer Bob Henrit and session bassist Mark Griffiths (who includes The Shadows recent reunion tour on his CV).

Currently in the midst of promoting a new solo album, *Rise Like the Phoenix*, Verity is also working on developing a new signature Fret-King guitar with British guitar guru Trevor Wilkinson, which is based on the Fret-King Super 60 model with a few extra Verity-inspired twists.

"For years I played a Les Paul Custom and I stuck with the Gibson's for a while but now I've got three Fret-Kings. My new signature model is a Strat-type layout with a pair of single coils in the middle and the neck and a hit P90 in the bridge. It's also got a little tone circuit that I came up with that you can just switch in a sort of midrange out of phase sound, not a thin out of phase sound. It's a really nice guitar and should be available to the public next year."

Verity is fortunate to have been in the industry during the 60s and 70s, exciting times that saw huge and influential changes in music and one of his abiding memories is a gig supporting Jimi Hendrix during June 1970. Unfortunately John recalls this event as a bit of sad affair as Hendrix was clearly past his best but seeing great talent like Hendrix and others of his ilk fall victim to excess served as a reminder that the rock and roll lifestyle isn't always what it's cracked up to be.

"I've seen a lot of people fall by the wayside and I learned to know when to stop. I've gone over the top in the past like everybody has and I've worked with people who have gone more over the top from me and I suppose I've thought that I'm not going to let that happen to me. One of the reasons that I don't like meeting my heroes – and I've met quite a few over time – is that invariably they let you down. The gig with Hendrix turned out to be his last gig in America and he was in bad shape. I'd looked forward to this gig for ages; opening for Hendrix was a big deal for me. Part of it was excitement and part of it was fear, I was frightened of being shown up but it didn't happen on the night because he was all over the place, it was such a shame."

When Argent fizzled out by the mid 1970s Verity found himself in London recording with a new band, the appropriately named Phoenix. Things went well at first but outside the studio walls the rock music establishment that had provided John with a secure living since leaving school was being turned inside out by a strange and exciting new sound that was emerging from the streets and basements... "Phoenix was probably the most unfashionable band on the planet!" Verity laughs,

"The reason we formed Phoenix was because on Argent's last tour of America we felt that there was a move towards fairly straight-ahead traditional rock. There was a real feel that it would be successful... and then the punk thing happened! We got back to England and went into the studio but by the time that we'd finished the album punk had taken over everything and it caught us out. There were a lot of bands that were not unlike us that changed the way they looked and pretended to be a punk band, which

they weren't at all. It's since been put about that punk was almost a sort of political movement but it wasn't at its grass roots. It was about Malcolm McLaren manipulating a load of young people into doing this outrageous thing that would take over the country. I just didn't see what there was in the punk movement that warranted the effect that it had on the industry; it changed everything but not necessarily for the better."

Verity insists that despite his suspicion of punk he has never been elitist and is keen to emphasise that he is always keen to encourage what he perceives as genuine talent in up and coming musicians. "I have always worked with young musicians and even in our heyday we were never standoffish, there was none of that going on. The big rock bands of the time were built up to be these huge untouchable things and we never prescribed to that point of view." For details of how to order *Rise Like the Phoenix*, log onto [www.johnverity.com](http://www.johnverity.com). **PM**

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