

When I was asked to do the gig, I didn't know what to do. I told them, "Listen, I'll play drums with anybody." Sting rang me up and said he thought we should do something together. Then, somewhere along the line, it was worked out that it was possible for someone to get on the Concorde and perform at both gigs. Originally, Duran Duran was going to go on in England, and then—since the members are the same—Power Station was going to be on in the States. They all chickened out. By default, I was the only one who did it. I didn't just want to go over and play my songs again. I had bumped into Robert Plant and he had asked me, "Do you think that you could get me on the Live Aid thing? Wouldn't it be fun if I got Jimmy Page to do it and you could play drums and we could do the old Led Zeppelin songs?" I told him to call Bill Graham. The answer was yes. They wanted me there early to rehearse the old Zeppelin songs, but I couldn't make it and I told them, "Listen, I know the songs. I know them backward and forward." Well, that day the tempos were all over the place, and it may have seemed like it was my fault, because I was the one who hadn't rehearsed, but I would pledge to my dying day that it wasn't me. In fact, it was Tony Thompson who was racing a bit; he was a bit nervous, I guess. It came off because of the magic of being Zeppelin; but I remember in the middle of the thing, I actually thought, How do I get out of here?

PLAYBOY: What was the point of the Concorde trip?

COLLINS: It was like threading the two events together, which, in retrospect, I think it did. On the plane, all these elderly Americans were going back to New York for the weekend, saying, "What's going on here?" Before we landed, they were all caught up in the thing. Cher was on the plane, wondering what all the fuss was about. She thought it was for her [laughs], so she apparently locked herself in the bathroom, put on her wig and tarted herself up [laughs] and came out, and I went up to her halfway through the journey and said, "How are you doing?" I explained the Live Aid thing and said, "Why don't you come?" She said OK and later that night, she was on television singing *We Are the World*.

In New York, they got Immigration on the plane—something they apparently don't do even for royalty—and I was in a helicopter and arrived in Philadelphia about half an hour before Eric was on, then I was on, and then Zeppelin. It was an amazing day. At the end of it, I was back in New York and I was thinking, What's been going on today? I was in London this morning and performed with all those people and Eric just introduced me to Dylan and Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood and I performed in America, and then I played with Led Zeppelin doing *Stairway to Heaven*, and now I'm back in New York and tomorrow I go back home

again. It was extraordinary.

PLAYBOY: This all started with Bob Geldof's *Do They Know It's Christmas* session in London, the first Band Aid event. How did that one trigger this new wave of political concerts?

COLLINS: There was a report about famine in Africa that was on British television. It shook people up here. People were in the middle of eating dinner and suddenly there was this mass starvation on television. Everyone was up in arms about it. Geldof rang up the next day. He said, "It's disgusting. We have to do something. I want to make a record and we need a famous drummer." Two weeks later, I went to the studio for the session. It was phenomenal. There were about 60 bands there. I think I was the oldest one there. Youch. . . . So we were all just waiting to do our bit. When it came time for the drums, it was embarrassing, because I had the drum kit set up in the middle of the room and everybody was, like, standing there, watching. It took two takes. At the end, everyone stood up and applauded and it was all over so quickly. The best moments happen like that, I think. They mixed it that night and the next morning, it was on the radio; the next week, it was number one and the rest is history.

PLAYBOY: How did you feel about the controversies around Band Aid—the warring factions, the questions about the money's getting through?

COLLINS: The events have had such a high profile that it is obvious that the money is being carefully controlled and dispersed. Unfortunately, the governments in Africa are putting barriers up. The only thing that annoyed me was the difference between the American version of Live Aid and the British one. In England, if you wanted a cup of tea, you made it yourself. If you wanted a sandwich, you bought it. In typical American style, at the American concert, there were laminated tour passes and champagne and caviar. I don't doubt anyone's moral commitment to the cause, but the caviar and the cause just didn't jibe for me.

PLAYBOY: Yet you've never written overtly political songs.

COLLINS: Generally, that's true, though a song like *A Long Long Way to Go* is a political statement. It just doesn't come naturally for me to write like that. I feel that my music is helping in another way—helping people understand more about other people. That's really what I do best. I'm not politically motivated. I don't even vote. I have pretty strong views of what's right and wrong, though. There's so much to do, but for me that doesn't mean writing political songs. I write personal songs.

PLAYBOY: In *In the Air Tonight*, you're confessing that the person to whom you're singing left you for someone else.

COLLINS: People ask me, "Aren't you embarrassed? You're putting your private

life out for all the world to see." It's like I oughtn't to let people see that I was hurt, that I cry, that I do unmanly things. But I'm not embarrassed by it.

PLAYBOY: The lyric goes, "It's all been a pack of lies." How autobiographical is that?

COLLINS: I don't want to talk about details. All of that was reflecting on the split-up of my first marriage, but that's all I want to say about it. It's not fair to my ex-wife, who has her own side to all of this and now has a life of her own and is very happy, and it's not fair to my wife, Jill, who has been living with me for six or seven years now. We have our own life now and we're very happy.

PLAYBOY: OK, but the pain of splitting up, of loss, is a theme in a lot of your music.

COLLINS: There's more to write about, obviously, when you've been through something that affects you deeply. I can say that much. It opens you up; your spectrum becomes wider. It's a big step for me to be able to express it.

In a lot of my most personal songs, I am saying I had no way of getting in touch. They are like letters. A lot of the songs, particularly on *Face Value*, obviously come from that experience of loss, as do some songs from the other albums: *Why Can't It Wait Til Morning*, *It Don't Matter to Me*, *I Cannot Believe It's True*. That last song is specifically about after the emotional thing has died down, and he has to start dealing with the reality of the situation; he's frantically trying to dig himself out of a hole. *Do You Know, Do You Care* has the same theme, but it was actually written in broad, general terms: "You said you did, but you didn't./ You said you would, but you couldn't./ Do you really care or what?" But as for *In the Air*, that was the opposite; it was born of passion. I honestly don't know where it comes from, exactly what it's about.

PLAYBOY: How do you begin a song?

COLLINS: Usually with a rhythm. These days, I always use a drum machine, as you point out. The rhythm can set the whole thing up for me, set the mood. I just put on the drum machine and start mucking about. For instance, I had a tempo in mind—I was thinking of one of the Jacksons' songs, actually—when I strung a chorus on it. The line "One more night" just fit what I was playing. The rest of the song was written very quickly.

PLAYBOY: Besides your writing and singing—and the occasional foray into acting—you've made a mark as a producer of other artists' work, from Eric Clapton's to Adam Ant's. What's the attraction of working behind the scenes when you've had so much limelight?

COLLINS: At heart, I'm still a fan of people. If someone like Clapton or Philip Bailey asks me to produce him, I'm completely flattered. It's like I couldn't say no. I learn a lot, too. There's another aspect, particularly for the lesser-known performers. I

really liked John Martyn, an English blues musician, who was going to make a record. I sort of felt I understood his music. So I wanted in there basically because I didn't want anyone else in there, fucking it up. With Clapton, well, Eric has been one of my best friends for some time, and one day he just called me up. I was blown away by it. "My God, Eric Clapton wants me to produce him." Even though we're best mates, he's still Eric Clapton. I used to play Cream songs in my school band. Anyway, the fashion of music keeps changing, and people like Eric sort of get left behind a bit in people's minds, if nothing else. I saw producing his records as an opportunity to make people realize that this guy is still a fantastic guitar player and he's got a great voice.

PLAYBOY: You not only produced Philip Bailey but also co-wrote and sang on his hit *Easy Lover*. It's interesting that a white Englishman could become a producer for a black musician.

COLLINS: It was a real struggle. Bailey got a lot of flak for being produced by someone who is white. There was this paranoia that the album would not be played by black stations. In this business, you find out that there is more racism on the black side of

"In this business, you find out that there is more racism on the black side of the fence than on the white."

the fence than on the white side. They didn't want to know about me, because I'm white. We did it, though, and broke down some of those walls. *Easy Lover* was a black hit and a pop hit and my song *Susudio* was a number-three record on the black charts as a result of the thing's being opened up by *Easy Lover*. The race thing is not great on either side. If you're Prince or Lionel Richie, you can get played on MTV, but not many other black artists can. The reason I was on the video for *Easy Lover* was that I knew it wouldn't be shown if it was just Phil Bailey. Barriers will break down as there is more crossover, but they are slow to break down. Bailey and I working together, McCartney and Stevie Wonder or Michael Jackson. . . .

PLAYBOY: Are there others you would like to produce?

COLLINS: I've been asked to produce Tony Williams and Buddy Rich, each a very interesting project. I'd like to produce Aretha Franklin; I love her voice. And Steve Winwood for the same reason. Julian Lennon asked and I'm interested in that, as well.

PLAYBOY: But your first love—

COLLINS: Is drumming, right.

PLAYBOY: What drummers influenced you?

COLLINS: Everyone from Charlie Watts to Ringo to Keith Moon to Buddy Rich, Tony Williams, Steve Gadd. All those are influences. Especially Ringo.

PLAYBOY: What about Ringo?

COLLINS: He's very happy just to do whatever's right for the song. Some of the drumming on things like *Strawberry Fields Forever*, *Ticket to Ride*, the whole *Revolver* album are just great. Right now, I'm more interested in the sound of the drums and in playing what's right. I listen to some of the old songs that I played drums on and I can't believe the stuff I used to do. I'm less interested in playing as fast around the drum kit as I was; I just want to do whatever is right for the song, rather than get in as much fancy drumming as I can.

PLAYBOY: But it was Ringo's Beatle mate George Harrison who was indirectly responsible for one of your first breaks, wasn't it?

COLLINS: Yeah. When I was 17, I met him—he was recording *All Things Must Pass*. I got a call one night from the manager of the band I was in at the time, Flaming Youth. He asked me what I was doing and if I wanted to do a session. I said, "I just got out of the bath, man. I'm watching TV." He said, "Well, it's for George Harrison. They need a percussion player at Abbey Road." So I'm screaming at the cabdriver, who wants to give me a tour of north London, "Get me to the bloody studio!" I got there and Ringo's chauffeur let me in. I was totally starstruck. Ringo was playing drums; Harrison, guitar; Klaus Voorman, bass; Billy Preston, piano; Badfinger, guitars; Maurice Gibb, keyboards; and Phil Spector was producing. Mal Evans, the old Beatles road manager, was sitting in the corner. This was like a dream, you know.

PLAYBOY: So you're on the album *All Things Must Pass*?

COLLINS: Well, Phil Spector kept saying, "Just drums and guitar," and "Just drums and piano." Every time he said "drums," I thought he was talking about me. I'm not a conga player; my hands were getting red and blistered. I'm thrashing away about an hour later, after having gone through all the combinations of instruments, and he says, "OK, let's have the percussion playing this time as well." My hands at this point were completely shot and they didn't even have my mike on. Ringo caught what was going on and he turned around and sort of smiled. Anyway, they didn't even use that version on the album.

PLAYBOY: You go back in British rock-'n'-roll history, don't you?

COLLINS: Yeah, I was born at a very early age. [Laughs] Sorry. I'm from Hounslow, which is in London. It's a commuter town. The stations are always full every morning with people going to the city.

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"When they have those polls about the most attractive men, good old Woody Allen comes out on top."

PLAYBOY: What did your parents do?

COLLINS: At that time, my mother managed a toy shop. My father was manager of an insurance company. He's the only one in the family who has ever had a real job. Even now, my sister is a theatrical agent and my brother a cartoonist, and he actually contributes to *PLAYBOY*. We were lower working class, I guess, but I have good memories—Sunday-afternoon lunches with friends of the family. After lunch, I would always go upstairs and play drums in my bedroom, which was above the living room. I was very young when I got a toy drum like most kids get, only the novelty never wore off. Then they made me a drum kit when I was five—metal poles with drums attached. I'd sit down and bang away.

PLAYBOY: What do you remember as the first music to make an impression on you?

COLLINS: Definitely, the Beatles. I used to stand in front of a mirror with a tennis racket, pretending to be John Lennon. Still do. When I first heard the Beatles, I went out and bought each album as it came out. There was other music in the house—my sister was listening to Tommy Steele, who was sort of the English James Dean—but the Beatles were really it for me.

I played for people from when I was five or six until I was maybe 14. By the time I was maybe 12, I had a regular drum kit. My father's boat club had these shows every Thursday night, and I used to play drums in the shows, accompanying an organist and some singing.

PLAYBOY: There's an image of drummers' being the shy ones, sort of in the back, hiding behind the drums. Anything to that?

COLLINS: Not in my case. I wasn't shy at all. I was acting at this point, as well. My mom had left the toy shop and got involved in an agency for kid actors. She sent me on an audition for a production of *Oliver!* and I got a lead role. The headmaster at my grammar school said, "Well done, boy, but you can't do it, because your schooling will suffer." So I had to choose between school and a theatrical school and the job. So I left. I did the play for seven months. I got £15 a week and it led to other auditions. I did some TV plays and a few movies—I was an extra in *A Hard Day's Night*, by the way, though you can never see me, and then in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

PLAYBOY: At that time, England had the Mods and the rockers. Were you either one?

COLLINS: I was a Mod. That meant we listened to The Who and Motown music and

we wore our hair a certain way and wore Mod clothes. I did all that, though I never had the motorcycle and I didn't like beating up rockers. I've had only about four fights in my life.

PLAYBOY: During that time in theatrical school, when you were acting, were you drumming?

COLLINS: I was in a school band called The Real Thing. My ex-wife was one of the singers in the band. So I did this alongside the acting. I finally took the exams after school to give you credentials for a job and I passed only three. I'm a bright person, but I didn't take it very seriously. When I was studying, *Younger than Yesterday*, by the Byrds, was out; I was interested in that scene, not the exams. We were precocious theatrical students. Didn't have time for exams. It was then that I decided to stop acting as well and just become a drummer. My mom and dad were very annoyed with me when I stopped acting; my mom kept getting acting calls for me and I was saying no. My dad was angry because he had been very proud to show me off to his friends as being an actor in the West End and there was this bad press about rock groups and drugs and orgies. As if that was where I was headed. . . . It's a shame, because he never saw me successful at this—music. He died before any of this started. What a shame . . . all those times I was upstairs, playing the drums or listening to records, he'd just come home from work and we'd pass in the stairway or something. It wasn't like there was disinterest, but that was just the way we did it. He'd go off to watch television and I'd be upstairs. Anyway, I wish he could have seen that I didn't become a drug maniac or anything. That the music led somewhere. That it was OK that I quit acting.

PLAYBOY: Though at first it wasn't.

COLLINS: Yeah, I was in a number of unsuccessful bands. Finally, I read an ad for an audition for a drummer for Genesis. This was 1970. About '73 or so, I met Andrea, my girlfriend from school, and we got married. Peter [Gabriel] left in '75. I was divorced in '78. Genesis has been the constant now for 15 years.

PLAYBOY: You and Andrea had two children before you broke up; you've obviously written about that period.

COLLINS: Yes. *Please Don't Ask* on the album *Duke* was written about that time: "Please don't ask me how I feel, I feel fine / Oh, I cry a bit, don't sleep too good, but I'm fine. . . ." That one. "I know that the kids are well, you're a mother to the world / But I miss my boy / I hope he's

good as gold. . . ." I used to look at Simon when he was very young, sound asleep in his cot, and think, He doesn't realize what is happening. He doesn't realize I'm not going to be here. I got more upset by that than anything. Thank God they understand more as they get older. After the initial wounded pride of being the one jilted, the thing that stuck was the kids.

PLAYBOY: You wrote *Doesn't Anybody Stay Together Anymore?* Are you planning to give the song a new answer?

COLLINS: You know, I was very happily married to Jill, my present wife, when I wrote it, but I had been divorced, my manager was getting divorced, a couple of good friends were getting divorced, and I thought, What's going on? Doesn't anybody stay together anymore? The song came from that. In the old days, people were manacled together by Victorian principles. You stayed together and had a mistress. That went to "If this doesn't work, let's forget about it and try again."

PLAYBOY: Then do you try not to get bitter over relationships?

COLLINS: The key is communicating. So many times in a relationship, one person is doing something or saying something he or she doesn't really mean and the other person is reacting to that. It is being able to say, "I didn't mean that," having the guts to say, "I was wrong." People move farther and farther apart and—bang!—you cut the cord. The point is to get wiser. People are very complex. We get so hurt, so self-absorbed that we don't even see the other person. But it comes down to the fact that you get only one life, unless you get into the other theories on that one, and you may as well be as happy as you can be while you're living it. I agree that there's no reason to stay with a marriage if you're going to go home and get beaten up every night. And sometimes people are happier apart. But an awful lot of people split up because they have failed to communicate.

PLAYBOY: Does a singer of your, uh, generation have groupies?

COLLINS: Well, they tell me my fans range from young kids to adults. In Britain, my female fans are probably older, middle-aged housewives. In America, it's probably 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds. To be honest, if I go shopping with my wife in Los Angeles, where we spend more time than anywhere else in America, mothers, girls of 16 and everything in between will come up. I've had 16-year-olds come up and ask me for an autograph for their mothers. I like it fine.

PLAYBOY: Are you surprised to be viewed as a sex symbol?

COLLINS: Yeah, but, see, I have this theory. You know, when they have those polls about the most attractive men, somehow good old Woody Allen always comes out on top. That saves the day for me. He's more consistently up there than someone like Tom Selleck or Don Johnson, who

are the traditional good-looking chaps. He beats them because of personality. His sense of humor is far more important than anything else. I probably tend to do better than others because of my personality, rather than my intense good looks.

PLAYBOY: One critic wrote that you looked like a dad.

COLLINS: Somehow, I'm called that a lot. I'm not sure how to take it. I wear baggy trousers and sometimes the waist is up to my chest. That must look like a dad. Also, I'm sensible, I suppose, like a dad.

PLAYBOY: Two of your admirers are Prince Charles and Princess Diana. What is it like to have royal fans?

COLLINS: Diana was first a fan of my music because of the romantic side, you know, the ballads. When I saw her one of the first times, she said, "I love *Separate Lives*," and I told her I'd send her a copy. She told me she already had one. Once I actually gave them a complete set of the Genesis albums and the next concert I played, she came up afterward and asked, "Why didn't you play more from *A Trick of the*

Tail?" I mean, she actually had *listened* to the things and remembered the songs we hadn't played. Anyway, she is a very, very attractive lady, far more attractive in person than in photographs. And he comes off as a really decent man. He really tries his best, I think. A good chap.

PLAYBOY: You have a lot of other celebrity fans. Go ahead and name-drop.

COLLINS: Shall I? All right. Jack Nicholson showed up at a show in Los Angeles. And it was the same night as a Lakers game. Tom Selleck has come and paid scalpers \$100 for tickets. When Audrey Hepburn came up and introduced herself to me at the Academy Awards, I was, like, speechless. And she asked me for my autograph for her son. Kathleen Turner came up and said she was a big fan. Michael Caine asked to be introduced to me. Meryl Streep was sitting with Jessica Lange. I thought of going over and saying something about how fantastic she was in *Out of Africa*, but I was too embarrassed. Finally, my wife told me, "Go on. She would probably love to know how you

felt." Finally, I did and she said, "Well, look who's finally come up and said hello to me." I don't mean to sound bragging when I say this, because I don't mean it like that. I'm just blown away that people I see on television, these movie stars, these people I admire, come to see *me!*

PLAYBOY: And you haven't fathomed that you're a superstar?

COLLINS: Not one bit. I just don't think of myself as a star. This is what I do for a living. I'm fortunate that I make ends meet. . . .

PLAYBOY: More than make ends meet.

COLLINS: Well, that I make a good living doing it.

PLAYBOY: What *has* the money meant?

COLLINS: If I ever really want something, I say to myself, "I've worked for this. I should be able to have it." I used to save and save and save and not spend anything, because I feared that when I was 50 or 60, I'd need the money. I still have that in me. It used to be that I wouldn't consider going with Eric to shop and buy a suit that cost £1000. Now, once in a blue moon, I might do it. But we still try to live on a budget. Jill draws X amount of money at the beginning of each week and that lasts until the beginning of the next week.

PLAYBOY: But if she runs out, she can go back to the well, can't she?

COLLINS: Yeah. But at the beginning of every week, I ask her, "Did you draw the money out this week?" I mean, boring, terribly boring, normal stuff. But, in fact, we both have rather modest tastes. Even our hobbies are relatively inexpensive. She collects ladies' compacts and Bakelite dishes; I collect tin toys and flying ducks. My car is five years old. Eric keeps trying to get me to buy a Ferrari, but I wouldn't feel comfortable in a Ferrari. The car I've got goes fine. It's an old friend to me. So the main thing about the money is that it gives me comfort to think that if I were to lose a leg tomorrow, I wouldn't have to worry. Meantime, I'm no big spender.

PLAYBOY: Rock 'n' roll once was a young man's game; but you've been called one of the few adult rock stars. How do you react to being called such a terrible thing?

COLLINS: At least it isn't calling me uglier than George Orwell. It makes me sound awfully middle of the road, though, like Barry Manilow, who has been in this interview half a dozen times now. But I guess the point is that you can be an adult and that doesn't mean you are boring. It's a comfort to know that you can grow up and still feel things deeply, still have something to say.

PLAYBOY: And if you were to write some new songs based on what you're feeling these days?

COLLINS: I guess they'd be pretty happy songs. Does that sound boring? Hmm. . . . Well, it's not. You'll see. You'll hear.



"No, I'm not looking for a particular book. On the contrary, I have a list of books I'd like you to remove from your shelves."

