

FINAL SAY

Randy Newman

68, singer-songwriter, Los Angeles.

I saw a studio orchestra when I was five-years-old and it stayed with me. I saw my uncle (a film composer and conductor) there and it impressed me. I felt it and maybe there weren't that many things that I really felt when I was a kid.

I just played piano when I was a kid. At that time singer-songwriters didn't exist. When I was a young-enough kid, rock 'n roll didn't even exist.

A friend of mine suggested I write some songs and I did and it all started. The best record I ever had was Cilla Black's version of I've Been Wrong Before.

I wrote a song for Frank Sinatra Jr and it was called Susie or something. I couldn't stand it. I wasn't writing songs as well as people like Carole King.

At that point I switched. I had got tired of what I was doing. I chose to write as if I was writing a short story - not consciously but that is how it came out. Simon Smith and his Amazing Dancing Bear was the first one I did like this. It felt better for me.

It is still a funny medium, writing words which don't mean what they say. But people get it more now.

I didn't think of singing until someone offered me a record contract. My voice was universally condemned and maybe is still, to some extent. I always kind of liked it. I'm hard on myself as a writer but maybe I am too easy on myself as a singer.

I read a lot of non-fiction. I'm all over the place. I read eight things at once and don't finish anything. I don't know if this is because I'm getting old.

You can write happy music without being happy yourself. I knew a number of singer-songwriters and I never quite believed that because this song sounds this way, that is how this guy is - because it wasn't so in my experience.

You could be talking about the fields and clouds but also be snorting cocaine and eating animals. The way you write isn't necessarily indicative of the type of personality you are. There are some nice punk rockers.

Writing for children is different because it is usually a direct assignment. The picture itself indicates the song so in Toy Story, You've Got a Friend In Me is about Woody's special partner. It's a little easier than pulling things out of the air. It's fortunate that I have been assigned good

pictures.

I love the sound of an orchestra. A lot of film scores are done without it, which is fine. But I really love working with a studio orchestra.

If I can do two things at once (like humour and satire) I like it best. It's seldom that I say 'I want to write about this'. Most of the time I just sit there and play. It's not mystical.

I probably should have done a live album a while ago and, as a live performance, the one with the London Symphony Orchestra at St Luke's was a pretty good one. I'm glad there is a live record of what I do and people seem to like it. It was a very good orchestra to play with.

Adele is a very good writer but I hope she doesn't hurt herself singing. She is good, particularly for someone so young.

I like Stevie Wonder very much as he has written some really impressive stuff. I still like Paul Simon and he takes chances. I loved The Beatles, Brian Wilson and The Beach Boys. Carole King is one of the best songwriters of pop music.

There are a lot of things I try to live by. What I have learned from the Disney movies is be yourself and people will like you.

Randy Newman is at The Sage Gateshead on February 22, www.thesagegateshead.org, 0191 443 4661. Randy Newman: Live in London is out now on Nonesuch, www.randynewman.com

