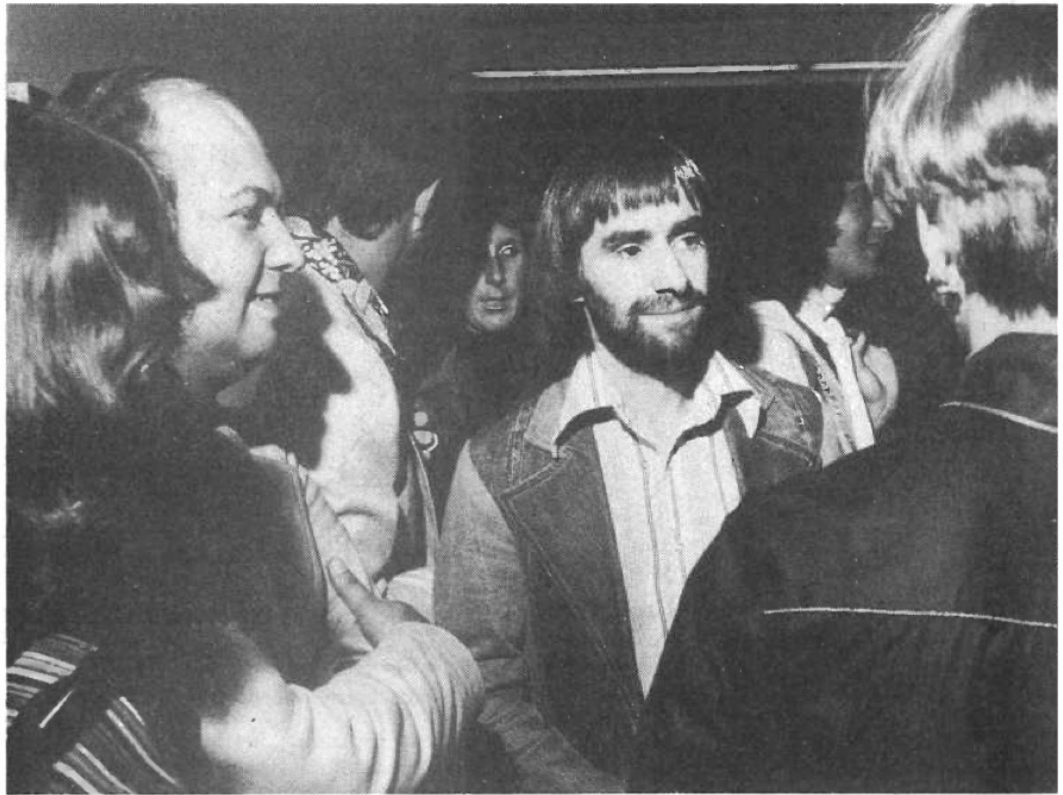


# de Burgh transcends language barriers *by Ritchie Yorke*

27-year old Chris de Burgh is proof positive of the abundant universality of contemporary rock music and its astonishing ability to transcend alleged language barriers. A recent chart-topper in Brazil and now the budding cult figure in French-speaking Quebec, Chris de Burgh was born to British parents in Argentina and brought up in Malta, Nigeria, the Belgian Congo, England and Ireland. His cosmopolitan background adequately reflects his diversified following and his perceptive lyrics (which to the uninitiated are amply demonstrated on his first two albums for A&M - *Far Beyond These Castle Walls* and *Spanish Train & Other Stories*).



A&M's Chris deBurgh at recent opening of label's Canadian offices.

As a result of his fervent Quebec following, Chris de Burgh travelled across Canada recently on an interview tour which is bound to draw overdue English Canadian attention to his splendid music. Subsequent concert dates with A&M stablemate Gino Vannelli seemed likely to increase that acceptance even further.

"I'm not in the music business to get rich and buy a country castle," he quickly pointed out, "I just want to keep the present family castle going." The residence to which he refers is Bargy Castle in the county of Wexford in Southern Ireland which his father (a retired British intelligence officer) purchased to operate as a hotel in 1960. Chris de Burgh got his musical start playing guitar and singing for his family's hotel guests.

Early in 1974, de Burgh marched out across the Bargy Castle drawbridge and headed in the direction of the London music scene, bearing a demo tape of his songs in his briefcase. Soon after he was signed by the U.K. division of A&M Records thereby gaining the distinction of being the only British act to be contracted by the label during that year. He recorded his first two albums in London and was extremely disappointed at British sales (*Spanish Train & Other Stories* sold more copies in Quebec than in the entire U.K.) With justifiable reason, he does not have a lot of respect for the contemporary British rock scene.

"There just isn't much room for anything new in Britain these days," he says. "Everything over there is geared solely to the top 30. It's just awful." Without a top 30 single and in the absence of progressive FM radio as we know it, de Burgh's two albums received little or no exposure in the

U.K. But thanks to heavy play on CHOM-FM, in Montreal, the second album sold exceedingly well in Quebec and provided de Burgh with a North American career launching pad.

Then came the incredible South American success right out of the wild blue yonder. "I was sitting around at home in Ireland last October when I received a call from a record company guy in Buenos Aires. He was calling to congratulate me on getting a number one hit in Argentina. The company down there released *Turning Around* from the first album, and apparently it had gone to number one in only two weeks. It was selling some 10,000 copies a week. In February this year, they called again to say I was still number one after three months. I could hardly believe it."

Naturally enough, de Burgh's record company enthusiastically organized a promotion tour. "They sent me a first class ticket to Buenos Aires which I quickly cashed in for two economy tickets so that I could take along my lady. We had a fantastic time, I was treated like a superstar. The record has sold about 400,000 copies in South America, and it's on fifteen assorted hit compilation albums. You will readily appreciate that all of this unprecedented treatment made me realize the importance of being international. Up until then, I'd been completely parochial."

As far as his own song writing is concerned, de Burgh says: "I'm a very spontaneous writer . . . I get an idea and I take it in the direction that feels right. Writing songs for me is like doing a crossword puzzle. Usually I start with a line that comes out of nowhere and I just build on it. I enjoy the

*de Burgh continued on page 13*

*deBURGH continued from page 3*

process but I find it very taxing. I believe that a creative person, whatever he or she does, can't rush things. Anything I've achieved has been worth waiting three years for, and anything I achieve in the future might well be the same. When you rush, the creativity disappears and the quality suffers."

de Burgh, whom discerning French rock critics have dubbed "le nouveau Cat Stevens", is not overly impressed by the relative standard of quality in much of today's rock music. "I think it's time for intelligence in rock. Too many singers try to get to the point immediately; not too many people are taking a lot of trouble with the words. I like to be subtle without being too obvious."

After his brief Canadian tour, de Burgh planned to return to the U.K. to work on his third album. "I'm writing the songs for the album now. But there's no point in rushing anything out just for the sake of the record company's enthusiasm. If the public like you, they're still going to like you in 12 months from now.

After all, I'm only here because a record company thinks I can sell a bit of plastic. And to do that, I have to break out of a stylized mode. I've already made decisions to that effect about my third album. At least three of the ten tracks will have to serve as channels for programmers. It sounds rather callous but that's the way it has to be."

Despite his realizations about the irrefutable restrictions of format broadcasting, I somehow cannot see Chris de Burgh totally selling out his soul merely to satisfy the whims of mass media-ocracy. He is far too deeply motivated by his art to flog it

out in bargain basement remnants.

For the time being, at least, he's content to allow his career to be guided by a self-confessed "riches to rags" philosophy. Which makes quite a change from the feed-off-greed mentality of so many of today's rock superstars. And a welcome one at that.