

# NOW WE'RE TALKIN'

By Helen Marketti

## A conversation with the multi talented Ron Dante

The singer of *Sugar, Sugar* for the fictitious cartoon group, The Archies shares his thoughts about music, producing, and a career that has spanned 50 years.

“I grew up in a musical household,” said Ron. “Records were always playing on the phonograph. It was an exciting time for music. Elvis Presley certainly made an impression on me with his bombshell appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show. It stimulated my interest to play guitar. I also liked The Everly Brothers and Doo Wop groups such as The Platters, The Crests and Johnny Maestro. As I grew older, my influences were The Beatles, The Beach Boys and The Four Seasons. It was the best music. These groups continue to be popular and set the standard.”

“When I was 14, I had a guitar and formed a little group. We were going to play a club one evening in Staten Island,” remembers Ron. “However, I ended up breaking my leg and had to wear a full cast up to my hip. A rubber tip was put on the cast so I could still do the show. I made \$75 that evening. It was then that I thought this is something I can do because I enjoyed playing in front of an audience.”

“When I was 16, I received a music publishing deal with music legend Don Kirshner. The opportunity with Don changed my life because I was being paid as a songwriter on his staff. I realized that this was a career that I would love,” recalls Ron. “I was being managed at the time by a local manager who had his office in one of the music buildings on Broadway in New York City. It was a building where offices of managers, booking agents and record companies were located. Don Kirshner’s office was in the same building. It’s a funny thing because at the time, my manager wasn’t doing much for me and the secretary suggested I go upstairs and meet some of the people in Don’s office. She introduced me to some of the staff who said they would introduce me to Don. I auditioned for him and he said, ‘I’ll sign you. I like the way you sing and I like the way you write.’ I received a songwriting-publishing contract. He told me that in addition to writing songs that I would be the staff demo maker for other artists. I was able to sing for Carole King, Gerry Goffin, Cynthia Weil and Barry Mann who were great songwriters. I was a lead singer, background singer or chorus. It was a dream come true. I was very lucky. It paid enough where I could travel back and forth from Staten Island to Broadway. That is the story of how Don and I met. He remained my mentor for most of my career.”

Ron was in a group called The Detergents. They did a parody of *Leader of the Pack* (Shangri-Las) called, *Leader of the Laundromat*. “For a year we toured with Dick Clark’s Caravan of Stars. Other artists on the tour were Herman’s Hermits, Bobby Vee, Little Anthony and The Imperials, The Shangri-Las and Freddy Cannon. We toured from Canada to Texas to California and everywhere in between,” said Ron. “Mary Wise (Shangri-Las) was very sweet and didn’t mind that we were doing a parody of their hit. (*laughs*). One of the guys in our group had an Uncle who wrote the song. I guess you could say we were the first of Weird Al (Yankovic) to do a parody.”

Ron discusses the songwriting process. “I like to start with a title and then write the song. I can write the chorus and then think of a verse around the chorus. I like to write for other artists, too. You need to think about which artist would be appropriate to sing what you have written. In fact, I have a song I am currently working on that I feel may be appropriate for Garth Brooks. The song is tailored to his style. When it’s finished I will send him the demo and see what he thinks. When writing songs, it’s mostly inspiration from within but you need to be aware of the outside world.”

Many will remember the song, *Sugar, Sugar* (1969) which was sung by the fictitious cartoon group, The Archies. Ron is the voice of *Sugar, Sugar*. There was never an actual band called The Archies. “*Sugar, Sugar* had been around for 8 months and then I was asked if I wanted to sing, *Tracy* with The Cuff Links which also became a hit. For a while on the national charts, *Sugar, Sugar* was number one and *Tracy* was number nine,” remembers Ron. “This is what you live for; to record songs that everyone hears and knows. *Sugar, Sugar* is a fun song. I love singing it.



In fact, each time I sing it, it’s like singing it for the first time.”

Ron views the 60s as a golden era for music. “There was an unbelievable change during the decade. The early 60s had songs that were nice and pleasant but then rock and roll flower power came in with such a presence. There was a big turn around. Liberal rights were changing. The generation represented vibrancy. I very rarely look back, however. It’s my history and experience. It’s part of my legacy. I incorporate my experiences into my present day life. I have learned from each decade.”

In addition to songwriting and touring, Ron is involved with record producing. “I was evolving from singer songwriter to jingle singer. I would be called in to sing for COKE, PEPSI, CHEVY and so forth. One session was to sing a jingle written by Barry Manilow”, explains Ron. “On this particular session the singers were Barry, Melissa Manchester, Valerie Simpson (Ashford & Simpson) plus myself. Barry had recognized my name from The Archies and The Cuff Links. He said he was a singer songwriter and was looking for someone to produce his music. A few days later, I met with him to listen to his songs and I knew immediately they were going to be hits. I agreed to produce his album. I produced nine of Barry Manilow’s albums. The hits were *Mandy*, *I Can’t Smile Without You*, *I Made It Through the Rain* and *Copacabana*. It was a great run and it all began by he and I being scheduled to sing on the same commercial jingle together.”

Currently, Ron is working in the studio producing music for two teenage girls from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. They are 15 and 16. “They are like two younger versions of Beyonce,” said Ron. “We are working on songs that are appropriate for their age. A great song has a hook and a beat. It’s fun to experiment with sound. I like to see what else is being played.

The music industry is constantly changing. There is great music out there with many choices. All you can look forward to is change.”

For more information: [www.rondante.com](http://www.rondante.com) Ron Dante is on Facebook

Today's Best  
**MIX97.1**

**Rated #1**  
**With Northcoast Women!**

**Today's Best**  
**Mix of Music!**

**Enjoy Great Savings With “Discount Deals”**  
**Online: [www.mix971FM.com](http://www.mix971FM.com)**