



Beatles' drum alum lives on the bright side

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He is the poster child for missing out on rock 'n' roll glory. He is forever the forgotten drummer, the guy stranded at the station when the gravy train chugged out of town.

No one could fault Pete Best if he still held a grudge, if he remained bitter 40-some years after the Beatles dumped him and soared to superstar heights with their waggish new drummer, Ringo Starr.

But Pete Best doesn't sound the least bit resentful, even when talking about that dark day in 1962 when Beatles manager Brian Epstein fired him. Indeed, speaking by phone from the very same Casbah coffee club in Liverpool where the Beatles first cranked up their amps, Best sounds almost cheery about the whole thing.

"You don't live in yesteryear," Best quips, though I must admit the first thing that pops into my mind is the contrasting message in Paul McCartney's "Yesterday."

"Initially when it happened, there was anger and there was resentment and financial embarrassment. It does get you down a little bit. But there does come a time when your strong backbone says, 'You got knocked down, but you're going to get back up and start fighting again.' No use looking at what happened yesterday. It's about what happens today and tomorrow and over a period of time."

So at 63, Best isn't ditching the Beatles legacy but embracing it, touring with his brother, Roag, and The Pete Best Band in a rock show titled "Best of The Beatles" which hits The Intersection in Grand Rapids on Friday. He'll trot out early Beatles tunes and '60s standards he played after departing the Fab Four.

"It's a big-sounding band. It's music from my period of time with the lads, music we played in Hamburg, some Polydor and Decca stuff," he says of a group that plans to record a new studio CD this year. "We're not a copy band. It's The Pete Best Band: very big, very raw, savage sound. We love to get the crowd involved."

That means Best stays after shows to meet fans and autograph stuff, even Beatles memorabilia.

"I'm not averse to signing it," he reasons. "It's our way of saying thank you to them."

Of course, if time heals all wounds, Best has had lots of it to put the pain behind him, even if he says he never got an explanation for being sacked.

It helps that he's finally reaped some benefits from his association with the pre-Ringo Beatles. He earned royalties from the 1995 "Anthology" CD that included several songs with

Best on drums, and his family owns the historic Casbah -- which houses a production company and recording studio -- with hopes of opening it for tours.

"A lot of people tend to be mesmerized by the fact that you were a Beatle," he concedes. "They say, 'You don't know it, but you're a legend.' It's very gratifying."

Anyway, while Best may be the most glaring example of a rock musician who slipped off a shooting star, he's not the only one. Try Syd Barrett of Pink Floyd, Peter Green of Fleetwood Mac, Bernie Leadon of The Eagles, Dave Mustaine of Metallica and John Rutsey of Rush, who for various reasons weren't around when platinum albums started to pile up.

Best seems genuinely excited about touring the globe with his band, something he took up again in 1988 after working for two decades as a civil servant.

"Regardless of what happened 40 years ago, I'm a lucky guy. I've been married for 40 years and ... I've got a great band and health and happiness," he said. "At the end of the day, I put my pants on and I'm still Pete Best."

And hey, nobody else can say that.

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