

Feature

Pete returns to rock the Casbah

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by Lew Baxter, Daily Post



SHAKING hands with old ghosts has never really been part of Pete Best's agenda, and yet he probably, above anyone else alive, has most reason to feel aggrieved at the loss of celebrity and fortune, ignominiously ousted as he was as a Beatle, 40 years ago this month.

A year or so back, though, 60-year-old Pete and his brothers, Roag and Rory, made a peaceful pact to rustle up the past a bit and tell their side of the story, or rather their mother Mona's who - they declare, along with a legion of other knowledgeable folk - was arguably one of the most influential persons in kick-starting the Beatle legend.

In a new book, entitled *The Beatles - the True Beginnings*, the lads lay out their family's stall for historical eminence and relate in a lavishly illustrated tome the story of the fabled Casbah Club that their mother established in the basement of their rambling Victorian home in West Derby.

It was there that Best and his pals, the Beatles, first relished the taste of success and it was Mona - declare her devoted sons - who lavished encouragement on the early Quarrymen, and then the Fab Four, long before Allan Williams, their irascible first manager, or Brian Epstein, had come within a lion's roar of the band.

"It's the missing link, the untold story," comments the elder Best, clearly delighted that at last the tale should be made public and without rancour or angst. For he insists that the book - largely the brainchild of 40-year-old Roag - is not an exposé as such, or aimed at upsetting anyone.

"We just wanted to tell the truth as it happened, for the first time," declares a mildly-mannered Pete, known for his calm demeanour and lack of bitterness.

In fact, his own band, formed 15 years ago and featuring his brother Roag on drums as well, has won a huge international following, wowing sell-out audiences in America, Germany and Japan.

And, while he does acknowledge the relevance of the Beatles in this latter-day success he is, nevertheless, obviously over-joyed at this recognition of their own musical abilities. The music is, he quickly remarks, a reflection of his own era: "Good old rock 'n' roll stuff, a really big sound. Everyone tells us it's fabulous," adds Pete, now a four-times grandad and still loyal to Liverpool where he vows to end his days. But not just yet, as there's years to catch up.

Roag is a tad feistier about the tawdry way he feels both his brother and mother have been regarded in the pantheon of pop. He reveals that, once he got stuck into researching the background, his ire was roused at the hangerson who'd jumped on the bandwagon over the years to claim the credit.

"Our mother had a huge influence on the Beatles and effectively put them on the map. All that reality got lost over the years and it really got under my skin when I would listen to all these other people banging on. This is a tribute to our mother Mona and the truth," he declares.

The boys are officially re-opening the Casbah tomorrow night, with a wing-ding of a bash where they will perform with fellow musos Chris Cavanagh, Phil Melia, Dave Deavey and Mark Hay. It will also mark the launch of the book, although it won't hit the shops until September 16.

Over the next four days of the annual Beatles Convention in the city - reckoned to be the biggest ever - the Best brothers will be signing copies of the book, both at the club and the Beatles Story museum.

And Pete adds that they will also have pens ready on Sunday when he will be talking about the "real events" and the Casbah effect, joining the likes of Louise Harrison, Allan Williams and even Beryl Adams, Brian Epstein's first secretary, on a platform for a public discussion forum.

Beryl has remained Pete Best's chum over the years - and was born and raised within a spit of his house in Heyman's Green - and worked for Eppy when he fired the drummer. "I found out when I came back off holiday and was astounded," says Beryl, who still thinks it was a big mistake.

For decades, Best kept his head down and raised a family in simple obscurity, working as a civil servant at the local JobCentre. "I think people did respect my privacy and I was grateful for that," he comments. When he was first persuaded to take part in a Beatles convention, in 1985, his mother remarked that it was his return to showbiz.

"I scoffed a bit but she's been proved right," adds Best.

The Casbah closed on June 24, 1962, for various reasons that now seem clouded in the mists of time - and then, less than two months later, Best found himself fired from the band.

"It's an emotional time, opening it up again for the public, and its hardly been touched over all these years," says Best, who also admits to a rare touch of the butterflies at the prospect of the open-air gig on the convention's main stage on Monday.

There is a lot of nostalgia baggage and memories for Best to cope with and he murmurs: "Sure, the adrenaline will be flowing and the emotions running high at this show, even though we have played the Cavern many times in recent years. This is an important event for me."

* The Beatles - the True Beginnings, by Pete, Roag and Rory Best - Spine Publishing £25. Published September 16.

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