

More of Beatles' Best is yet to come, with a book, tour

By Jeff Guinn
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Forty-one years after he was kicked out of the band in favor of Ringo Starr, Pete Best says he's no longer resentful of the other Beatles.

Time had something to do with it.

"You can only think about 'could have been, should have been' for so long," Best, 61, said in a recent phone interview. "I don't deny I had hard feelings for a long, long while."

But money and recognition from his former band mates, whose careers exploded in fall 1962 just weeks after Best was ousted, made the difference in the drummer's willingness to forgive, if not completely forget.

"In 1995, when they released the first musical set of their *Anthology*, I was contacted and asked to cooperate with it," Best says. "I thought they might include one song from my days with the band, but they had 10. The money was nice" -- Best won't say how much he received in royalties -- "but what mattered more was the public acknowledgment that I'd been important to the group. It was, finally, recognition for services rendered."

Now Best is seeking more recognition, this time for the role the whole Best family, particularly matriarch Mona, played in the development of the Beatles and other bands that created Liverpool's famed "Merseybeat" sound. The newly published *The Beatles: The True Beginnings* (Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, \$35), written by Best with brothers Roag and Rory, is a photo-crammed coffee-table book that traces the genesis of the Liverpool rock scene to the small Casbah Club founded in 1959 by Mona in the basement of the Bests' sprawling home.

"She is the little-known hero of that musical explosion," Best says. "It was her idea to bring live music, the new rock music, to young people in Liverpool. My mother nurtured those bands, and they learned to perform well through their experience at the Casbah."

One of the bands was the Quarrymen, which included John Lennon, Paul McCartney and George Harrison. Other groups who later attained international prominence included Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Merseybeats, the Fourmost and the Searchers. Teen-age Pete Best enjoyed hearing them all play but spent most of his time helping Mona run the Casbah.

"A club has to be swept up," Best says, laughing. "But I loved being part of the whole environment."

By 1960, the Quarrymen had evolved into the Beatles. Pete was playing drums in another band when he was invited to join. Soon afterward, the Beatles began an extended stay in Hamburg, Germany. When they returned to Liverpool late that year, Mona Best promoted concerts for them in larger halls, because the cozy Casbah no longer could accommodate all their fans.

Best remained with the Beatles through mid-August 1962. Just as the band was about to record its first single with the British record label Parlophone, the drummer was summoned to band manager Brian Epstein's office and informed he was being replaced by Ringo Starr.

"No real reason was ever given," Best says. "In all these years, I'd thought the cause might come out, but

it hasn't." He has not spoken to any of the Beatles since, Best adds.

Afterward, Best fronted several bands whose careers went nowhere. He worked briefly as a baker, then joined a government job-placement service. Mona Best closed the Casbah in late 1962, having moved on to promoting occasional shows in larger venues. She died in 1988.

His inclusion in the Beatles' *Anthology* series reintroduced Best to modern-day music fans. Now the Pete Best Band, made up of its namesake and "five other lads from Liverpool," regularly tour Britain and will undertake two U.S. tours this fall and winter.

Best and his brothers are also reopening the original Casbah Club in Liverpool, complete with wall-to-wall memorabilia and even the spot where John Lennon carved his name in 1959 while helping paint the walls.

"For now it's only open for private parties and anniversaries, but by next year it will be back in full swing," Best said. "My band, I know, will play there, and we'll try to recapture all the spirit that came from my mother Mona's vision."

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