

ROCK N ROLL SHOWMAN

REMEMBER WHEN

DEREK AJ LISTER continues his tributes to figures on Bradford's music scene with this profile of Ray Kennan:

Ray (1942-2022) was born in Bingley and lived on Kent Road near the Oval housing estate. He was the supreme showman whose on-stage antics pervaded through his musical career. He revealed that in his capacity as group 'news-maker' many of his outrageous tales were greatly exaggerated for publicity's sake, while others were pure fabrication.

After attending Bingley Grammar School, he was employed by Harvey Smith, the show jumper, who lived in High Eldwick. But with rock 'n' roll all the rage, Ray found he had a good singing voice - the type that local groups were looking out for. His first group was The Belvardos, followed by The Deadbeats. To supplement his singing income he worked for a Bingley joiner and as a petrol pump attendant. Things got better when he joined The Del Rio Four as vocalist and compère, playing a season at Butlins.

Tales about Ray became legendary. There was the time he set fire to a piano during one performance, and the time he drove a van through double-locked doors at Bradford's Lyceum ballroom onto the stage, got out and calmly took a bow. On another occasion he turned a fire hose on a compère. Though his



antics gained extreme sanctions from the group, his talents were considered far greater than his liabilities - a judgement borne out later when he went on to perform with many international artists.

Ray formed the Ray Kennan Combo

and, being the consummate showman, kitted out the band in smart dark suits, white shirts and 'Slim Jim' ties. After disbanding the Combo he joined The Toledos then the Quiet Three then 10-piece rock 'n' roll band The Governors. Then Ray decided to go it alone and became a single vocalist

compère, which brought him instant success. He went on tour with Lulu, the Rolling Stones, Manfred Mann and Screaming Lord Sutch. Shows followed at the then famous Eden Saloon in Berlin with Sammy Davis Jr, Jerry Lee Lewis and Johnny Cash.

Ray Kennan was a talented and charismatic frontman. Derek AJ Lister and collaborator Reuben Davison profile Ray and other singers, bands and musicians from Bradford's 1950s and 60s music scene on their website

'It's Not Unusual' to know that in the early Sixties, Tom Jones, while unknown, spent some of his time working with Ray. It's hard to imagine the scene today: Ray Kennan and Tom Jones in the phone box on Cornwall Road in Bingley chasing bookings! Ray generally used that phone box as his office.

He went on to compère shows, one of his last took Blackpool by storm. PJ Proby failed to turn up to perform at the North Pier and Ray was asked to take over. His stage presence, experience and easy singing style more than compensated the disappointed Proby fans.

With the world his oyster, Ray coolly packed up and stole away. He'd had enough. He later said that "Bradford had a lot of talent, but perhaps we were a bit lazy. There was so much going on locally that many of us didn't bother to seek our fortunes in London, where the real money was being made. Besides, some of the clapped-out vans we drove probably wouldn't have got us there. With respect, some of the groups were managed by men who'd been greengrocers or butchers; they were successful tradesmen but they weren't Brian Epsteins."

Ray became a successful property developer but he joined our popular reunion rock 'n' roll nights at the Pile Bar, Midland Hotel and Hilton Hotel. He was still the showman of his rock 'n' roll days, singing Hello Mary Lou. A good friend sadly missed.

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