

TRIBUTE TO THE 'BRIAN EPSTEIN' OF BIRMINGHAM

Rock manager Roger Allen was as influential to Brum's 60s music scene as the late Beatles manager was to Liverpool's

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LARGER than life Roger Allen – the music sven-gali whose CV was an A to Z of the West Midlands '60s and '70s rock scene – has died at his Wolverhampton home.

The man dubbed The Black Country's Brian Epstein lost his long battle with kidney and liver disease last Saturday morning. The twice wed impresario was 76.

In straight-talking Allen, the region has lost an individual who almost single-handedly crafted the local live music scene.

He is credited with getting glam rock giants Slade their first record deal and managed wildly popular Wolverhampton band Finders Keepers, who featured Ian "Sludge" Lees on vocals.

Sludge went on to become a top TV comedian.

He also steered the Black Diamonds, Californians, the Montanas and The N'Betweeners.

The N'Betweeners, who secured a 1964 residency at famed venue, Kings Heath Plaza, later morphed into Slade.

Allen's influence is best summed-up by music website "From Roots...to Boots". It states: "While he was not a member of any of the groups, he was one of the most influential and flamboyant personalities on the local music scene. It was impossible to know him and not to have an opinion of him – good or bad, but never indifferent."

Allen was something of Marmite on the music circuit. Opinions of the man differed wildly.

But there's no doubt he campaigned relentlessly for his bands.

In 1966, pop magazine Midland Beat wrote: "Roger Allen spends as much time as possible with the groups he represents."

"Roger doesn't send his groups off to Germany and then sit back in Staffordshire hoping everything goes off well for them."

"He makes a point of visiting the venues they are booked into to check on the conditions for himself."

"Apart from sending his own groups to Germany, Roger negotiates appearances for others over



Roger Allen

“ He was one of the most influential and flamboyant personalities on the local music scene

there, but any groups paying a visit arranged by his agency have the satisfaction of knowing that he has first-hand knowledge of the venues concerned."

Rock music historian Brian

in the early 1960s, operating from the front room of his Wolverhampton home.

His first group, The Strollers, were honed at Courtauld's Social Club. They went on to gain a large fan base and in 1962 were the backing band during a West Country tour by one Paul Raven. Raven went on to find fame – and later disgrace – under the stage name Gary Glitter.

Under Allen, The Strollers proved regulars at such well-known Black Country venues as The Cleveland Arms, The Three Men in a Boat, Wolverhampton Civic Hall, The Connaught and Old Hill Plaza.

Finders Keepers came tantalisingly close to gaining Allen his first chart success – and the five-piece were certainly kept busy by their boss.

They played eight gigs a week before Allen gained them a 1965 residency at The Storyville Club, Cologne.

Finders Keepers honed their act into a cabaret comedy routine, which proved particularly popular in northern clubs.

But Allen was convinced much bigger things awaited his boys and left no stone unturned in the quest for fame.

In February, 1966, they featured on a mega Dudley Hippodrome bill that included The Walker Bros and The Kinks.

In fact, Scott Walker liked the band so much, he agreed to produce their debut single, Light, written by John Stewart of Day Dream Believer fame.

Despite high hopes of chart success, Light flickered below the Top 50. Finders Keepers did hit the big time Down Under in 1967: their novelty song Sadie The Cleaning Lady was covered by Aussie singer Johnny Farnham and reached number one.

There's an interesting footnote to the Finders Keepers story. The line-up briefly included Mel Galley, later of Whitesnake fame, and Glenn Hughes who went on to join Deep Purple.

The Montanas – another one of Allen's bands – gained numerous TV appearances, were played heavily on Radio Luxembourg and gained success of sorts in America. You've Got To Be Loved reached number 58 in the US Billboard.

The band were blissfully un-



Slade



The Montanas



Finders Keepers

ware the single had become something of a West Coast anthem.

Bass player Jake Elcock later revealed: "It was (vocalist) Johnny Jones who found out about the American charts. He was an avid reader of New Musical Express and Melody Maker whereupon he made the discovery."

"Johnny was a musical fanatic – he made it his whole life, he was up on all the latest fashion trends and musical press."

A UK hit eluded The Montanas – despite Tony Blackburn playing 1967 single You've Got To Be Loved three times a day on his Radio One show. Radio Luxembourg also made Ciao Baby its power-play.

Allen was equally tireless in his attempts to bestow fame and fortune on The Californians, from Wolverhampton.

They failed to trouble the charts, but supported tours by big names such as Jimi Hendrix, Cat Stevens, Engelbert Humperdinck and The Walker Brothers.

In a 2013 interview with The



Glenn Hughes

Mercury, Mick Brookes, former guitarist with The Californians, dubbed Allen "Wolverhampton's Del Boy".

He briefly managed The N'Betweeners – later to rule the glam rock world as Slade – in the late 1960s and gained them a record deal with Fontana.

During his long career, Allen fronted a number of showbiz agencies including the Astra Allen Agency, PMA and the Roger Allen

Agency and Accountancy Service.

When the music stopped, Allen became a timeshare salesman, a job that saw him work across Asia. He married second wife Donabel Chualim in 2003 and they made Wolverhampton their home in 2012.

Allen was an old school wheeler dealer, but he battled tirelessly for his bands.

He was, as website N'Between Times pointed out, "of his time"; you had to be beligerent to survive.

He explained to the site: "None of the local groups stood any chance of really making it big without involvement from the London agencies and without recording contracts."

"That was why I spent so much time down in London. I was probably there for about two years, living down there every week day and coming back to Wolverhampton at weekends."

"However long you peddled your wares in London you were always having to cope with influential individuals who could make or break you and your product."

"The very best example was a man named Maurice King who was incredibly powerful in the business and had quite an effect on the degree of success enjoyed by many of our local groups."

"Getting recording contracts and better bookings was very much a case of getting to the top man and hustling."

"It was no use just sitting in waiting rooms for hours, if not days, on end."

"You had to force your way in and push the product."

"That was how I got a contract for the Montanas with Pye, and for the Californians and Finders Keepers later with other labels."

"It was also how you got your group included on important national package tours. By the time the 'N Betweeners or Ambrose Slade, as they became known, got to Jack Baverstock and Fontana I was probably known all over London."

For Roger Allen, being pushy was paramount.

That persistence paid dividends. He will be remembered as the man who brought rhythm and blues to the Black Country.

'Fireball' dad saved by son

A son has been hailed a hero after saving his dad's life - when an explosion lit him up in a FIREBALL.

Majamil Ali, 57, was burning paperwork in his garden when he poured fuel onto the fire, sparking the flash flame to set his clothes alight.

Quick-thinking son Mufazil grabbed a curtain and wrapped it around his dad to put out the flames.

Using first aid training he received when previously working at McDonald's, the 35-year-old then removed his father's smouldering clothes.

Majamil suffered burns to his face, arms and chest on Sunday and is still being treated in a Birmingham burns unit.

Medics say Majamil's injuries could have been much more severe without Mufazil's swift actions.

Mufazil, who lives in Stoke-on-Trent with his parents, wife and child, was in the garden when he saw the fireball horror unfold.

He said: "My dad was clearing out the shed and garage and was burning



Hero son Mufazil Ali

some old paperwork in a metal drum and lit a fire but it wasn't burning very well.

"In the shed we had some fuel stored away. "He poured that on and it just exploded."

"The flames were on my dad's head and side. "I jumped across with an old curtain, smothered the flames and ripped his clothes off because they were still burning."

"I used to work at McDonald's 10 years ago and had first aid training so I knew what to do."

"I just reacted – it was lucky the old curtain was there."

"It all happened in less than 10 seconds but in that time the damage was done."

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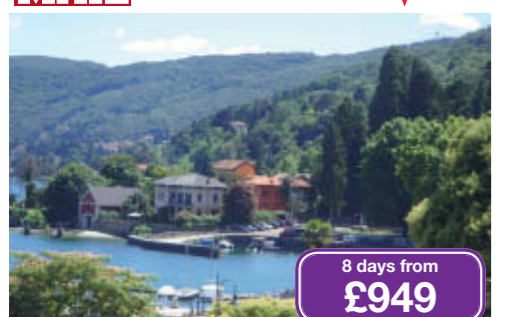
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