

Sam Leach 1935 – 2016

'Besammy Leacho'

If you mention the name Sam Leach, two things immediately spring to mind: the disaster of the Aldershot booking where The Beatles played to just eighteen people, and Operation Big Beat, where The Beatles played to over 4,000. It is for the latter that he should be remembered, though he always recalled Aldershot with a smile too.

Sam Leach was born in Liverpool on 17th December 1935. He had just celebrated his 81st birthday when he died at home on 21st December 2016 after a short battle with cancer, a battle he fought with the indomitable spirit that drove his whole life.

Sam was different among the promoters in the early Merseybeat scene, because he was a rock and roll fan first and foremost, which gave him an affinity with the groups that no other promoter had. He had big dreams and a passion that few could match. In the late 50's he started promoting dances around Liverpool.

Sam came across The Beatles in early 1961, not long after the group had returned from Hamburg. He immediately spotted their potential, and, as he was now promoting at the Casanova Club and Iron Door in Liverpool city centre, he sought to book The Beatles as often as he could. Not content with simply promoting The Beatles, he wanted to manage them too. He built up a good relationship between himself and the band, and, to show his intent, at the same time that Brian Epstein was circling, he hired a big car, and decided to put The Beatles in front of the London A&R men. He had a provisional booking in London. But, when that booking was cancelled, his good friend Terry McCann arranged a hall in Aldershot, just 30 miles from London.

However, the local newspaper didn't run the advert for the gig, as Sam's cheque didn't clear. Only 18 people turned up to see them, and that was after some persuasion to entice passers-by outside the hall!



The photos and story have gone down in legend, and effectively ended any hopes of him managing The Beatles. Brian Epstein sealed the deal and, as Sam always said, only Brian could have made The Beatles that famous.

What Sam did with Operation Big Beat, however, could not be topped by any promoter. He hired the Tower Ballroom in New Brighton, on the opposite side of the River Mersey, and put on one of the greatest rock and roll nights ever seen! He took the best groups in Liverpool, and put them all on the same bill. The show was topped by The Beatles and had an audience of over 4,000 people. Sam had to organise the ticket sales and promotion, which was natural to him, but he also

had to arrange late night buses to make sure the fans could get home. When he tried to follow it up with booking Little Richard, and he had made the arrangements verbally, Epstein stepped in and made a better offer to agent Don Arden, and Sam was side swiped, beginning his eradication from the official Beatles story, like many others.

After the Beatles found world-wide fame, Sam was involved in writing and compiling the fan magazine "Beatles On Broadway" published by World Distributors Ltd in 1964.

This was reprinted in 1983 with a different cover and title as "Follow The Merseybeat Road".

When John Lennon was murdered in 1980, it was Sam who put his life to one-side for days on end and virtually single-handedly organised a vigil for John at St George's Plateau in Liverpool, attended by thousands of fans. That is what Sam could do, and nobody else. He then repeated it for George too. Sam stayed in touch with Paul McCartney, and every time Paul performed in Liverpool, Sam got an invite to the concert and to see him backstage.



That recognition from Paul meant the world to Sam. As he always said, "The people who matter to me know the truth". How right he was. Sam's love of rock and roll followed him through his whole life, and I am proud to say that he was a close friend of mine and a source of inspiration too, with our shared love of The Beatles. He was a well-read and intelligent man who could talk for hours - and we did! Sam's autobiography "The Rocking City" was published in 1999.

In spite of The Beatles Sam loved his family first and foremost. Although he and his wife Vera divorced, they remained good friends. Sam leaves a wonderful family behind in Debbie, Paul, Tony and Samantha. His life is being celebrated in a new film due out in 2017, a tribute to an extraordinary man who was larger-than-life.

David Bedford

