No Matter What They Say

A comment regarding the 2018 edition...

This revised version of my biography on the band Sweet was undertaken for two simple reasons. The first was as a tribute to acknowledge the 50th anniversary of the group's formation. The band was conceived in the first weeks of January 1968. Over a few jars at The Swan in Ruislip, Middlesex Brian McManus, Mick Tucker and Frank Torpey hatched a plan to bring their talents together in a project known as The Sweetshop. Doubtless they entertained modest, or perhaps even grandiose ambitions of success, but it's reasonable to assume even the most optimistic of the trio would never have foreseen just where and how The Sweetshop ended up.

The second reason for this updated account was a decade-long itch to tidy up the previous edition which first saw the light of day in 2007. There were some errors, inaccuracies of fact and some gaps in the text which needed some touching up. The Internet's reach now helpfully throws even more light into the darkest corners and obscure crevices of the British/European music scene in the 1960's and 70's. I thus found it much easier to discover nuggets of new information and rectify, I hope, my major blunders found in the original version. Along the way I've also managed to find yet a few people more connected with Sweet's history. Most were happy, if not bemused, to find themselves answering questions about their long distant past and they are credited appropriately in the source section. Extra special mention and sincere thanks goes to Chris, Lee and Martin- the boys of Generation X- who all showed great insight and sensitivity in dealing with the precious memories of their chum Brian. Ric Bennett, Kevin Smith, Phil Moss and Gordon Fairminer (again) chipped in with some previously unseen photos and anecdotes too. Louise Longson provided invaluable encouragement and assistance translating old articles from German to English. You'll find that and more of her work on the excellent TheSweetBook page on Facebook.

Unfortunately, as with previous attempts, I failed to get some obvious family, friends and confidants to contribute to the 2018 account. In some instances the person I was seeking for comment had sadly passed away, did not respond or simply could not be found. This version's not perfect either, I'll hasten to say, but it'll have to do. For now...

Thanks to those of you who bought the book the first time around; I hope you get something from this edition. For first timers- up you all and good evening!

Mick Duthie
New Delhi, India
December 2017

Sample Content

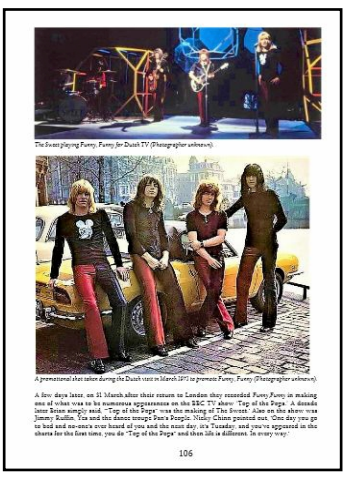
The Countdowns recording career was going nowhere in particular but they played a few gigs around their hometown of Hayes. In the burgeoning London music scene Steve met a variety of stars and more than a few aspirants. This included drummer named Phil Wainman who was about to release his first solo single. The Countdowns garnered their first 'real' manager in Phil Jay who also had an interest in a Mousalorr club and steered his new band into various support roles. However, the band certainly wasn't enough of a money spinner to sustain Steve and his mates. He said, 'I left school at sixteen and I got a job in a solicitor's office as an odd-job boy and general layabout! The thing was that I did get on, got promoted from odd-job boy to (conveyancing) clerk. And then the new odd-job boy left and I was put back in my old job.'

Steve Pettitt, right of picture, c. 1965. (Photographer unknown)

Steve confessed, 'Actually, I enjoyed the work, at times, but I was always having time off when things went wrong with the group I was with at the time. As it happened, I stayed there for three years and during that time I did have thoughts about being a lawyer but didn't ever get as far as pursuing it seriously, probably because my heart wasn't in it.'

Steve believes The Countdowns may have morphed into another band during 1964 called Nikkolas James and the Chilers. The lineup variation included a keyboard player named Ray Thompson and they may have recorded a track entitled *When You Walk By*. Ray told Mitchell Dansleyrist, 'In those early days I played the organ and I remember Steve was an amazing bass player, even then. (He was) Also a great singer, with ability to do harmony in a unique way. We would have been about 14 years of age. Our drummer Eddie (Rinkards) went on to play with Edison Lighthouse. Steve was always a good guy, easy going with a great sense of humour and always cared about music.'

Steve spent most days on public transport such as buses or trains countering legal documents to London for processing and registration at various offices. As his employer had no real idea of how long all this consuming and paper-shuffling would take Steve was presented with the opportunity to spend a few moments here and there doing as a young man, pleased. He would spend most of this 'spare' time in the studios of Southern Music listening to bands playing and recording. I spent hours there. Groups like 'White Plains were recording there and I'd just sit around and take it all in. They did used to wonder back in the office why I'd been away so long, but no-one seemed to query it.' Steve returned to music, if only) gave it up for six months - I was pissed off and disillusioned.' It was at Southern Music studios where Steve met session musicians Mick Kees and Robin Shaw. Kees had played with John Carter and Ken Lewis in the band The Ivy League. The group became a vehicle for publishing the songs which stemmed from the Carter-Lewis partnership. Carter was the resident producer at Steve's second 'office' at Southern Music.



The Sweet playing Funny, Funny for Dutch TV (Photographer unknown).

A promotional shot taken during the Dutch visit in March 1971 to promote Funny, Funny (Photographer unknown)

A few days later, on 31 March after their return to London they recorded *Funny, Funny* in making one of what was to be numerous appearances on the BBC TV show 'Top of the Pops'. A decade later Brian simply said, "Top of the Pops' was the making of The Sweet.' Also on the show was Jimmy Ruffin. 'I'm and the dance troupe Pan's People. Nicky Chinn pointed out. 'One day you go to bed and no-one's ever heard of you and the next day, it's Tuesday, and you've appeared in the charts for the first time, you do 'Top of the Pops' and then life is different. In every way.'

Chapter 45

Glam & the Damage Done

Andy announced the band was intending to follow up the Lyceum gig with a ten-date tour of the UK in March. The band was not inclined to jump onto the nostalgia bandwagon. They were acutely conscious of using-colonies for their art, he said of their glam hits. Some of them were alright, I suppose. *Ballroom Blitz* is a good rock song, we still do that one live. I think we're all proud of that one. We won't do *Blockbuster* live now. If we did that we'd be shovelling in that era. It would keep us back there.' Sounds magazine obliged with a feature article to coincide with the tour entitled 'The Original Bliss Kids'. Steve Kennen summarised '...seven years on, the sticky grasp of Bubblegum rock still stains the Sweet's every move, and such was the damage that today the band's name still conjures up visions of glitter, fandoms and Indian headgear. At a long beam looking then the public will never forgive them for it.

In the interview, conducted at the band's Shepperton rehearsal studio, Andy said of their new stage-indexing legacy, 'It's only meant it to be a piss take, also on some makeup for a laugh. I think we only did it for a couple of singles actually but everybody seems to remember that era. What really pissed us off was we'd go to other places in Europe, like Germany and Scandinavia, the good old seaboards, and they'd know we were a half-dozen hard. England would never forget that. They just thought TOSSERS! They saw you on TOTP and that was that. Andy mentioned. 'I know it sounds corny but we couldn't get past the images we created for ourselves on TOTP. We 16 or 20 year old blokes was gonna come and see us because he'd seen his 10 year-old sister with one of her singles in her hand. The image got slightly out of hand. And it was a great pity because we were getting on a fantastic show, we had Elvis, monster disks, smoke bombs and all the effects that have become bland today. It was flying over their fashion heads I'm afraid. We got we heard playing to that audience that we spent the entire gig trying to get each other to make mistakes. The blokes used to spend half the time trying to beat us up while the birds were trying to get back to the band with us. Come to think of it there were a few blokes who wanted to get back to the band with us too.'