

Tony Best

Most people know of him even if they have not actually seen him perform. If Carlsberg sends out performers he would be on the first delivery. Tony Best was born in Aberthaw near Barry in South Wales. He learnt to play the piano accordion as a lad and took it with him when joining the RAF as an apprentice electrician in 1957 at the age of 17. Stationed at Tern Hill, he used to practice in the drying room. Another young recruit heard him and he was invited to join their skiffle group playing Vipers covers. They started playing for local dances at £2.10/- a night for the band. His wage at the time was £4 so 10/- (50p) extra was great. He also took lead vocals. It was at one of these dances he met his future wife, Jean. They married in 1958 as he was being posted to Aden and they celebrated their Golden wedding anniversary last month.

He was later transferred to Germany and with a sergeant telephonist they formed a dance band which became the official RAF dance band for the next three years. He was posted back to Norfolk where he moonlighted for five seasons at a holiday camp as entertainer/comperere doubling his service pay before he went back to Aden and decided to give the music a break to become the dj on the local BFBS station. That was until a band let the mess down on new year's eve and he asked on air for musicians and another band was formed. Tony then got transferred back to Anglesey and used to play in the local power station club as resident artist. The steward did a runner so Tony came out of the RAF and took over the club. He moved from there to the Clock Inn in Amlwch and ran that for three years while adding to the income by playing the clubs as far as Chester and Barmouth, both solo and with his band, Midnight Sun. When he decided to go full time as a musician, he had his wife and young family to support, so he moved to the Midlands on a house exchange with a man from Shrewsbury.

Work was hard to get, being new to the area but the landlord of the New Inn in Prees gave him a residency on a Tuesday night for £18. It was the early 70s and he soon picked up others around the Telford area for between £12 and £15 a night. Meanwhile his skill as a stand up comic was rapidly becoming fine tuned to its present standard. He was also deputising in a local betting shop each afternoon, eventually becoming manager. That went by the board when he got the plum job as Court Jester at the Bear at Hodnet, the local place to be working, with Gerard Neuprus who used to ride his horse into the dining room each night. Gerard is the number one horse master in the UK these days, doing all the major films. Tony went back to celebrate his 70th birthday there.

It was while working at Red Wharfe Bay in Anglesey that the promoter suggested he become a full time Country singer and his first gig was at the Keep It

Country Club in Newcastle under Lyme. His first big show was playing with Miki & Griff and also Jimmy Payne from the USA (he wrote for the Glaser Brothers) and Kelvin Henderson from Bristol.

It was in response to requests from this show and an empty five week run of Mondays that lead to the forming of the Lazyacre Country Music Club at the Seven Acres Rugby Club in Shrewsbury in March 1978, starting with the best of the local bands like the Down County Boys, Cotton Gin, Ken Harris and a young band from Liverpool, West Virginia. It started as a concert venue with the 'best' of order while the act was playing - it is a myth that the sale of crisps was banned on noise grounds. The Lazyacre is still one of the premier listening clubs in the UK with regular sell out nights. (Check the gig guide.) Tony was approached in 1979 to comperere events for Pontins who were putting on Country Holidays at Brean Sands, Prestatyn and Hemsby. He did this for the next five years, even leaving one afternoon to fly up to Aberdeen to comperere a show and come back the next day.

It was a chance meeting with Colin Lee of Ladbrokes, later Warners, however, that lead to him forming Tony Best Leisure and putting on his own holidays including the massive Norbreck Hotel in Blackpool. His first weekend there was £29 per person full board! It started with five events a year rising to 22 at its peak, including European trips. His daughter Lynne has now taken over the running of TBL and is in sole charge. She employs Tony to comperere her events. See the advertisement in this issue if you want any more information.

Celebrating 30 years with the Lazyacre, Tony says he will continue to run it because of the enormous number of people that support the club. It moved to the Hospital Club until that closed, then to the Radbrook Hotel, which has been knocked down to build houses and is held now at the Lord Hill, Shrewsbury's number one hotel.

