



Cherry Red Promotions: Iain McNay's story

Transcription of excerpts from an interview with Iain McNay

Iain: I left home and moved to Thornton Heath. I lived in 22 Kitchener Road, Thornton Heath. And that's where I met Richard Jones. Richard was then at Croydon Art College. And it was he that encouraged me, I used to go to see bands with him sometimes, there was a venue called the Croydon Greyhound, and I used to go with him to see bands there. There was local bands like Stray, they were a band from that area, I remember seeing them there with Richard. And I think I was probably, at that point, working at a film company called Avco Embassy. Richard told Will about me 'cause I'm a, you know, I was an accountant, so I knew about money, the basic things about money and how to, hopefully run a small business. And they, er, Will had a hobby as a DJ, and that was his talent. Richard was very much the more visual, he ended up designing our posters and our tickets, and looked after the visual side. They both knew much more about music at that stage that I did in terms of what sold and what might pull, and of course, they lived in Malvern, so they knew what would probably be successful at Malvern Winter Gardens.

So I remember driving up to Malvern, and I had a Ford Capri at the time, I can remember that. Meeting Will, and you know, it was important for Richard that I liked Will, and Will and I got on fine, and Will was actually a lovely guy, it was hard not to like him really. And then the three of us started Cherry Red Promotions. And it was, I think Will's idea to call it Cherry Red. And that time the Groundhogs had an album out called *Split*, and it had a track there on it called *Cherry Red*. So we had the first gig the 3rd July 1971, which of course, was very exciting for us all, and Hawkwind, Skin Alley, Sidewinder Disco, which

was Will's disco, 60p. And I think we had about 800 people. The capacity of the Winter Gardens was 1200, official capacity, and I think we just about broke even on 800, so we were well happy with that, that our first gig had been a success really. I just think we were all positive about it. Will and Richard knew the local area, they felt that Hawkwind had a big enough name to pull, which they did. So, I don't think we kind of thought about failure. I think too many people in life think about failure, you've got to think, well you know, it's not going to bankrupt us if it doesn't work, so we just went for it and it worked.

I think we already had the second line up booked a few weeks later, which was Uriah Heep and Trapeze, which went a lot less smoothly 'cause Uriah Heep did a huge moody, and for some reason, I can't remember the reason now, decided they didn't want to play and, oh dear that was a whole drama that evening. And we realised this wasn't quite as easy as we thought, promoting gigs, you know, here we were, big time rock promoters at Malvern Winter Gardens, and we thought, oh God, if all bands are like this it's not fun at all. But I think we made a small profit then as well, yeah.

Will and Richard did most of the groundwork. Richard designed the tickets and the posters, and Will looked after, we had roadies that--, 'cause in those days the bands used to bring these huge sound systems and loads of equipment, and we had roadies that just earn a few bob help bring the equipment in. So Will would look after that side. He was kind of, in a way Will was more the face of Cherry Red locally, he was the one that dealt with the bands and people knew, and he was already a bit of a name 'cause he was a local DJ. We should say that Will, very sadly, passed away several years ago. He was such a lovely man, and it was always great working with Will.

I would sit in the little kiosk there at the, there was a kiosk on the right, on the left hand side when you came in the Winter Gardens, and I would sit there and take the money for the tickets, and pay the bands, and then make sure that we paid all the other people that needed to be paid, and see if we made a profit and loss. So I had the easiest job really.

I forget how it started exactly, but fairly soon we had an agent called Steve Parker. He used to book all the bands for us, so he would be in touch with other agents, they would know who was going on tour. And so Steve would let us know, in time it was via me, but I always, obviously, let Will and Richard know, and they still made most of the decisions of who we had and who we didn't have at the Winter Gardens. And so we always knew who was going on tour and who was likely to be available in terms of they were happy to play the Winter Gardens because some wanted to play, obviously, bigger venues. Other people, obviously, weren't yet at the stage of their career where they could pull enough people for us. So we tended to be in the zone, so as to speak, we knew who was going on tour. And really that was the best way to do it because the agent would take adverts in the music press, *Melody Maker*, *NME*, etc, and *Sounds*. So you had further publicity than our local publicity. So that was always best to be part of a tour where we could.

My memory is that I loved the whole time. Even when we had a bit of trouble it was still a learning experience. It was something to stretch you a bit, and I've always liked being stretched in life, and having a challenge and not being quite sure what to do. You see, it wasn't really a business for Richard, Will, and myself, it was a hobby. I think we took a few bob out, but I really can't remember, it was just expenses we took out. So it had to be fun. If it wasn't fun and interesting what was the point of the whole thing? So we were experimenting, and as the trends changed, as new music was coming out we wondered, of course, if we could put something on that was significant in the change at Malvern.

*A transcript of the full interview with Iain McNay is available from
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