



The Rock Contests, 1963-1965

Transcription of excerpts from interviews with Cath Shinton and Alan Hoida, about the rock music contests held in Malvern Winter gardens in the 1960s

Cath: I was rowing with my sister, we never did get on, and still don't, [laughs]. But we were arguing about which was the best band in Malvern, and she was adamant that it was The Falcons, and I said, "No it isn't, it's The Trojans." And we went on shouting at each other, up to the point where my father said that he would put an end to this. He said, "I will book somewhere, a hall, and we will get the bands together, and we will get the audience to vote, and we'll find out who is the best." So he approached the Winter Gardens for just one date initially, and then asked for groups to enter the competition. And we ended up having a first rock night in April '63. So I was actually 14 by then. It was an eight till midnight dance. It was something that had never been done in Malvern before. And it cost the audience the princely [sic] sum of four shillings to get in. As far as I remember the evening went very well, and we felt that it needed to be extended to a series of evenings, so that we could run up to a semi-final and then to a final. So, over the months this happened, we put the word out that we wanted bands. We had bands from all over the county, and further afield. So there was a lot of bands showing their interest.

Alan: There were a lot of really good local bands then. I went to see The Cossacks, Dennis Key was the main singer. And they dressed up in Cossack outfits. There were the Renegades, who were very much into doing an early Rolling Stones thing. There were The Ravons, girls in white dresses, they were very good. The Sundowners, they wore mustard yellow suits, and then had a

change of suit in the interval. So all these bands, plus many more, would play, and he used to do a voting system where they'd be given numbers for how, you know, for their performance, outfit, you know, likeability, etc, etc.

Cath: Over the months we ran the heats, and then the semi-final, and then there was a three band grand final. The first grand final was The Cossacks from Worcester, The Cherokees from Eckington, and The Playboys from Bromsgrove. What my father, in his wisdom, decided to do was to not use audience voting for this night. He felt that it would be too easy for the band managements to gather up votes, to buy votes, whatever, to get their group through to the final and to win the trophy. So he decided that there would be invisible judges within the room that the audience wouldn't know. And on the night they filled in forms as to content of the songs, the performance, the presentation, this sort of thing. And you can imagine the ballroom was absolutely jam packed full. I think we had a capacity of 1500 in that night. That was the capacity at the time. And the rank outsiders won, The Playboys from Bromsgrove. After that and over the years the same format was used again. Again, all the nights were very successful. And I can remember going to one grand final, we would go up in the car and dad would park right outside the front doors of the Winter Gardens. And we went up this night, and if you know Malvern you will know when I say that the queue went back to the traffic lights, and round the corner, and down the hill.

As time went on he started experiencing problems with the Winter Gardens management. We can only assume that it was a jealousy issue because he hired and paid outright for the hall, there was no sort of percentages going to them, that was their fee, and that's what they got. And they could, obviously, see that that Dougie was actually making a little bit of money out of this. The first thing that happened was that there was new fire regulations, which took the numbers down from 1500 to 1200, so we lost 300 customers that way. The next thing that started to happen was that they, obviously, wanted more money for the hire of the Winter Gardens. So we went from Saturdays to Fridays to try and keep the cost down. Not quite so successful with the Friday

nights, the Saturday nights were always very good. But the crunch came when my dad felt that he was going to have to move to a Thursday, to be able to afford to buy the room. And this was actually the beginning of the end, quite honestly. Because youngsters can't come out on a Thursday, I mean you're looking at an average audience age of sort of 15, 16, 17. Thursday nights you've either got school or work the next day. There's a transport issue of getting back to where you've come from. Buses into Worcester were a nightmare, as were trains. Not so bad at the weekend because they used to lay on specials late. But once you get into the week and you're on standard services you can't get back. So, yeah I feel that that was the beginning of the end for him, and he got to a point where he said, "It's a pointless exercise now." So whatever was going on at the time, wherever we were within the contest, it was run to its conclusion of a final and that was it, basically.

*Transcripts of the full interviews are available from Rock Around the Hills
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