

Waltzing Round the Spire

100 years of Music in Chesterfield

David McPhie

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by

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1 - Venues	Not yet published	
2 - The dance band leaders and musicians	Not yet published	
3 - Jazz	Not yet published	
4 - Skiffle and country	Not yet published	
5 - Rock 'n' roll	Not yet published	
6 - Cinemas	Not yet published	
7 - Theatres	Not yet published	

Contents

Introduction

About the author

Acknowledgements

1 - Venues

2 - The dance band leaders and musicians

3 - Jazz

4 - Skiffle and country

5 - Rock 'n' roll

6 - Cinemas

7 - Theatres

Introduction

In contrast to the experiences as retold in my book (jointly with Ian Lee - published in 2018) 'In the Shadow of the Crooked Spire', which covers the 1960s and early 70s, I really had no affinity with the dance band years; the palaces of waltzing and quickstepping being far from my natural environment, as opposed to the music and culture of the 1960s.

But I decided to make a contribution to the 'chronological jigsaw', looking at the development of Chesterfield's music culture over the previous four decades, hoping that maybe the baton will, for more recent decades, possibly be picked up by such as Stuart Smith with tales from the Fusion Nightclub, and Aaron Brown with his [S40Time podcast](#), (including musician interviews conducted by both myself and Aaron for exposure via the podcast). Already in place of course are Neil Anderson's [Dirty Stop Outs Guides](#) for the 60s (written by Pete Dodd), 70s , 80s and 90s'.

Thus, with the inclusion in the accompanying website of Geoff Sadler's Rendezvous dance hall story, commencing with its opening in 1925, there would (hopefully will) be nearly 100 years of Chesterfield music history preserved for posterity.

In conducting my research, I discovered more than I thought existed prior to the 1960s, but it by no means completes the total picture of all genres of music endemic in the area. Traditional folk music, beyond my remit, but worthy of further research by someone with the time to 'do a Cecil Sharp', on the traditional songs and performers of the area, is one such strand of the musical culture still to be uncovered.

The majority of this book and the accompanying website covers the dance bands of the period, from the earliest memories I could uncover in the 1920s, through the 30s, 40s and 50s, to the 'sunset years' of the 1960s, when probably the last notable survivor of the early, pioneering dance band days, Al Needham, finished his residency at the Victoria Ballroom, Chesterfield, succumbing at last to the onset of the 'beat group' era that had swept the country. These groups drew their initial inspiration from the American inspired rock 'n' roll invasion of the late 1950s, thus bringing about the change in use of the ballroom and dance hall venues, from that of the relatively sedate ballroom dancing (waltzes, quicksteps, etc.) to be replaced by the frantic tones of rock and roll.

There was a short period when ballroom dancing existed uneasily alongside the rock 'n' roll promotions that were rapidly taking over the ballroom and dance hall venues. But the cultural change was inevitable and left the remaining dance bands to compete between themselves for the private business functions, Christmas parties etc. that were to provide the opportunities to fill their diaries from then on.

And of course then came the DJ (mobile disc jockey) to further limit even those dwindling opportunities, as a much cheaper option to entertain the audience and 'balance the books' !

I was surprised to discover so few jazz bands from the area, as also a dearth of rock 'n' roll outfits, and one skiffle group (initially attached to the Al Needham Band). A significant part of the evening entertainment scene were the Cinemas and Theatres, and they too are featured herein.

I hope you'll enjoy the 'chapters' in our waltz around the spire.

David McPhie

April 2023

About the author

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