

INTERVIEW WITH SANDY LOWENTHAL , Friday 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2024

Interviewer Chris Firmin

Born Nov 1948, Port of Spain, Trinidad

Mother became a teacher in England, father a Librarian at the British Museum

Beatles were a huge influence when they burst on the scene in 1963.

Dad loved folk music and the blues of Big Bill Broonzy.

Bob Dylan also a big influence on Sandy with his "Freewheelin'" album.

He had piano lessons as a child, his sister playing double bass.

Formed a band at 14 years of age influenced by Beatles.

First gig was at Chiswick Rowing Club, paying £5 each.

Also played local pubs in Chiswick and Southall

His mum agreed to help buy him an electric keyboard and his band could then play numbers such as 'House of the Rising Sun', soul stuff, Sam & Dave, Booker T & the MG's.

Worked in various temporary jobs such as stacking in warehouses.

Gigs at colleges, e.g. Goldsmith's College, and later at West End clubs at places like Beaches and La Bousilaise , the latter an upmarket club frequented by the Kray Twins; one night Ella Fitzgerald dropped in during the early hours with her entourage and briefly sang along with the band's James Brown medley !

NYE 1999- Sandy and the band played a gig in Bahrain for £1,500 (then big money).

Around this time disc Jockeys started to take over from live bands and restrict playing opportunities for bands at functions and clubs.

Back to the early days:

Anecdote: opposite his school is Chiswick House Grounds where Sandy spotted the Beatles being filmed.

Challenges in West End: humping gear up and down stairs, seedy West End night clubs including hostesses and strippers.

In West End small clubs would often expect a combination of bossa nova, jazz standards and straight hits – SL was OK with this.

Smoking marijuana was prevalent in West End, also alcohol.

Musicians in the main concentrated on making a living.

Sandy joined a music class at his local college in Chiswick, studying piano and guitar. Then took up Cello!

Then did 'A' Level course, then a degree, encouraged by George Brown a flautist at Dartington College. So, Sandy took up the flute and moved to Dartington where he stayed for 6 years before returning to London to complete a Teachers Qualification course at Roehampton.

Started playing at functions with a large band at hotels in Park Lane – Hilton, Dorchester etc.

Was also teaching flute.

Any discrimination encountered? None apart from an incident of unacceptable racist language at school.

Spent 10 years on Musicians Union Equality Committee. Attended annual conferences around the country.

Formed a band with other function players but short lived.

Big decision – Sandy decided to sing Calypso music in pubs mainly social and political rather than traditional. He formed a 10-piece band and performed at Folk Festivals including the Cambridge Folk Festival.

These days he performs his own calypso music in schools as well also other Caribbean (and Indian) music. Also works with refugee children.

Has composed special songs for organisations such as the West Indian Ex Servicemen Association for a visit to 1<sup>st</sup> World War cemetery in Belgium.

Nominated as "Calypso Monarch" in 2010 and 2011. Wrote Calypso called "Too Rich to Care". Wrote a song for the distinguished Trinidadian born author V. S. Naipaul.

Tour of Ibiza with musicologist Ian Macdonald.

Did music for programme on Alexander the Great at Pinewood but not paid union rates.

No personal experience of Archer Street but often went to Giaconda café in Denmark Street in search of gigs and news.

Looking back – Sandy loved the interaction with other musicians and creating a groove where everyone in the band was contributing to, and enjoying, the groove. "Live is best".

These days Sandy writes what he likes, paying for his own recording, or 'writes to order'. He's happy in this free role.