

TOM HALL 1944-2003:

Northampton 's own Songwriter, musician , performance artist and raconteur.



A tribute by **MARK GRIFFITHS** .

It is with great sadness and regret , that I have to face up to the passing of one of my oldest and dearest friends Tom Hall . He died on Tuesday 25th of February in Northampton General Hospital . He leaves behind his loving family Diane, William, Katie and Edi and a legacy of brilliant songs , drawings and amazing stories. Unfortunately for all of us, Tom was not a household name .The world out there would have been a richer and brighter place if he had. However, to all his friends and fellow musicians in the Northampton area , he was and always will be ‘ Mega ‘ .

Larger than life he was. From his colourful dress , to his biting wit. His life, just like his glass , was always brimming . His unique songs and his often wildly eccentric performances , touched everyone who was lucky enough to witness one of his shows. Happy, sad, tender and definitely mad. Words that painted his astute and often surreal observations of life and people. He always left behind ‘food for thought’, whether playing a gig or just plain socialising .

I first met Tom when I was a shy seventeen year old guitarist, teaching beginners in The Midland Music Centre. Even then, he had a definite ‘aura’ .He came in to the shop looking ‘extremely cool’, to try out a new acoustic guitar. I had the unenviable task of demonstrating it to him and nervously fumbled my way through a tune , while he curiously looked me over. Although he didn't buy the guitar , I must have in some small way impressed him, as a week later he came back and asked me if I would help him with his guitar playing . I was rather hesitant at first , but he just sort of took me under his wing and we started meeting up on a regular basis. He would bring me a record , I would then try my best to learn it and show him how I thought it was played. Sadly for me, he didn't share my keenness for , Lonnie Mack , Chet Atkins , James Burton and The Shadows . He preferred something ‘ a little stronger ’ and educated me with the likes of Woody Guthrie , Otis Rush , Bert Jansch , Davey Graham , Bob Dylan and Paul Butterfield. He also introduced me (and always paid !) to the more bohemian side of life in and around Northampton. Was I naive or what ?

It wasn't too long before we started playing folk club floor spots and playing for our ‘ Mod ’ friends returning home dishevelled from their all-night exploits in London. We also made our first recording together at N.S.R. in Spring Gardens and and soon after formed our first electric band, ‘ The Flying Garrick ‘ .

We were given a regular Friday night spot , at the ‘ very happening ‘ Black Lion pub in St. Giles Street. Our payment for it was a ‘fire bucket full ‘of ice and water, topped up with a bottle of ‘Pernod’.

Our set list was a mixture of psychedelic blues, jazz and original songs that usually left both the band and audience completely mesmerised . Or was it just the effects of the cloudy water ? . These were very illuminating and exciting times for me .

This is how it has continued ever since. With names like.... 'Tom Hall's Dubious Blues Band, 'The Zeets ' , 'The Phippsville Comets' , 'The Celebrated Ratcliffe Stout Band' , 'The Strung Out Sisters ' , 'The Bareback Riders' and 'Tom & Guy ' (a much better bet, than any expensive haircut). Album titles like....' Dan, Half Dan and the Spaceman ' , 'Vanlag ' , 'Plastered in Paris ' and his only CD , ' Watering The Spirits ' . Although our careers have taken very different paths , I feel so privileged to have been involved with nearly all of Tom's bands and his recordings. Through the years, it has been a shifting sea of music , mayhem and bar-snacks. The stories are legendary . If you can ever find any of Tom's recorded works, please give them a listen . There are some very peachy tunes out there. My journey (with the help of Guy Fletcher) is to relive , restore and transfer it all to CD , at a later date.

Tom was very proud of his Northampton roots . He loved his family , his friends , his music , his cricket and his town . Most of all, he loved his life. A truly great ' British artist ' , deserving to be up there alongside the greats. A tragic loss to us all . Sadly we will never see the likes of him again.

These are a few small words in a giant story (hopefully one day to be told , in all it's glory) . Thank you Tom for all we have shared , it has been a honour and a treasure.

" Goo on then , off yuh goo ... I'll see yuh dayne tayne " .

Love

Mark

MARK GRIFFITHS : Lifelong friend , guitarist musical collaborator and producer of TOM'S albums. .