

thechronicle

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



OUR changing language. An email arrives to tell me: "Your parcel has been received at our sortation hub". I hope it will soon be sortationated and delivered.

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A FRIEND who had a pet-insurance policy for her cat with a £100 excess per claim, has just cancelled it. She explains: "I never knew there were so many animal illnesses that cost £99.50."

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IN TORN T-shirt and tatty jeans, with tattoos, armpits and acres of flesh on show, Russell Brand delivered a most important message to the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, currently considering drug abuse. His message was: Look at me.

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ACTUALLY, Brand was appealing for drug addicts to be treated with compassion. Curiously enough, it is hard to show much compassion when some junkie with a knife is demanding your wallet.

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EAST European street gangs are reported to be flooding into London to make the most of the pickpocketing at the 2012 Olympics. Meanwhile the EU, whose open-border policy makes this nightmare possible, is demanding a 6.8 per cent rise in its budget. So that's two examples of daylight robbery.

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WE HUMBLE subjects of the United Kingdom were graciously granted a referendum on proportional representation. We may be granted one on reform of the House of Lords. But a referendum on leaving the European Union? Not a cat in hell's chance. What this country really needs is a referendum on whether we should be allowed referendums on issues that actually matter.

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IN LABORATORY tests designed to find a cure for blindness, it is reported that four out of nine mice implanted with new cells in their eyes managed to swim towards an exit. I am assuming the other five ran after the farmer's wife.

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I SUPPOSE we cannot argue with the survey of 6,000 shoppers which proves that Ikea is now Britain's favourite store. But such surveys tend to overlook those millions of Brits for whom any form of shopping is an admission of defeat and a purgatory to be avoided at all costs. They are called men.

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I WONDER how many people, nursing their loved ones with terminal illnesses, tuned in to Radio 4's religious spot at the weekend to hear some God-botherer telling us that the really great thing about death is how it makes us appreciate life all the more. I dream for the day when technology enables us to reach inside the radio and punch such clots very hard on the nose. Ironically, Auntie Beeb will not allow atheists to contribute to Thought for the Day - on the grounds that they might cause offence.

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"APRIL showers bring forth . . . May showers." BBC monthly forecast, trying to make light of heavy rain.

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

Music mogul proves you can follow your dreams

STEVE Jenkins is one of the most powerful figures in the music industry.

He was managing director of the world's largest independent record label, and he helped discover Britney Spears.

His partnership with Coventry-born Pete Waterman led to the production of some of the biggest selling albums of all time.

And it all began at Walsall's long-demolished George Hotel, sometime around 1970.

For a few brief moments, Steve pauses to relive his youth. He casts a wistful gaze as he recalls how his life changed the day the Radio 1 Roadshow came to town, his hands move quickly as he tries to recapture the moment.

"I can still see myself there now, I was leaning against the back wall, and Emperor Rosko was on the stage with his two turntables.

"I was about 14 or 15, and that was definitely the moment I wanted to be a DJ. "I saw the lights, the radio presenters running around, I had never seen anything like that before."

Steve, now 56, returned to his home town this week for the launch of his autobiography *The Future Is In The Past*, published by Anchor Print Group and available online via Amazon. The book was launched at the town's New Art Gallery last week.

Like virtually every youngster of a certain generation, his formative years were spent listening to different sounds on the Dansette record player at his home in Bloxwich.

"Probably from around 10 years of age, I had two loves, music and football," he says. "I tried for a long time to perfect Cliff Richard's quiff, lashing on Brylcreem to hold the creation in place.

Beats

"My first album my father bought me for my 10th birthday, it was Please Please Me by The Beatles - I think that was another critical moment."

As soon as he decided music was going to be his true vocation in life, the next stage was to make it a reality.

"I knew I had to amass a record collection, and I had to buy some equipment to perform with," says Steve. "I worked four nights a week on the petrol pumps at the Mobil garage by the Arboretum, and in the day time I got myself a job in Kwik Fit.

"On Saturdays I worked in my father's shop, the shoe department of the Walsall Cop in Bridge Street, and by the age of 17 I managed to buy a Vauxhall Victor estate and some DJ equipment.

"My first gig was at Pelsall Community Centre, and the fee that I would have been paid was £6, but they gave me an extra £2 for being very good.

"That taught me you should always do your very best."

As his name became known, he found himself working the many pubs and clubs that were popular on the disco scene in the 1970s.

"They were very happy times, I was doing exactly what I wanted to do, you used to be able to chat a bit between the records in those days."

He hoped to become a broadcaster, working in radio, but found it tough getting a break, and in 1973 he decided to try his hand

Walsall-born record producer Steve Jenkins talks to **MARK ANDREWS** as he launches his autobiography



Steve Jenkins with his Britney Spears



Steve Jenkins with collaborator and fellow Saddlers fan Pete Waterman



Leo Sayer provided Steve's first no 1 hit



Steve Jenkins with musical hero Billy Ocean

working in the record industry as a regional promotions manager.

At first he was a little unsure - "I didn't see music as a commodity. I was an entertainer" - but he quickly changed his mind. "When you've got your own record to promote, when you see the radio play you have secured affects the position, and then a television appearance affects the position, and you see it rising up the charts, that becomes addictive."

His first hit record was the re-release of the Small Faces' Itchycoo Park, peaking at No 8 in January, 1975. His first No 1 came two years later, when he guided Leo Sayer's When I Need You to the top spot.

He says one of the high spots of his career was discovering Britney Spears, while he was managing director of Jive Records in 1997.

"We had sat on Baby One More Time

for two years, we knew it would be a hit but we hadn't found the right artist to record it," he recalls. "Britney came to audition for us, she was with the Mickey Mouse Club at that time. She was perfect for that record, we knew she was right."

At the moment he is busy promoting the comeback tours for Steps and The Backstreet Boys, and through all that time he never lost sight of his other love of football.

Saddlers

Steve has been a devoted Saddlers fan ever since his grandfather first took him to Fellows Park at the age of eight.

At the height of his career he would fly from Los Angeles or New York to watch his beloved side play. He introduced friend Peter Waterman to the Saddlers in the 1980s, and says the campaign to

promote Steps' album in the '90s was almost entirely devised in the back of a car on the way to games.

He has never lost his love of his home town, either. A former pupil of Joseph Leckie School and Walsall Technical College, he says apart from the times when he was working in the US, not a month has gone by when he hasn't returned to his home town.

"I moved away to pursue my career, but I never wanted to leave Walsall, that's why I keep coming back," he says. "In my heart I still live here."

He hopes his story will also encourage youngsters to chase their dreams.

"It can be a rough road, I've had my ups and downs but at least when you have the downs you are doing what you believe in."

"I hope I can inspire kids to follow their dream. I know that's what I did."

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