

Ronan O'Rahilly, Georgie Fame and the Blue Fames. Where it really went wrong!

On the following subject I've written before but let's go back in time and also add some new facts to this subject: 'Was Ronan O'Rahilly the manager of Georgie Fame?' I can tell you there was a problem with an important instrument.

When in April 1964 Granada Television came with an edition of the 'World in action' series, which was a production from Michael Hodges, they informed the television public about a new form of Piracy, the watery pirates. Two radio ships bringing music and entertainment under the names of Radio Caroline and Radio Atlanta. Radio Caroline was the first 20<sup>th</sup> century Pirate off the British coast with programs, at that stage, for 12 hours a day. Interviews with the Caroline people were made in the offices of Queen Magazine in the city of London and included - among others - Jocelyn Stevens and the then 23-year old Irish Ronan O'Rahilly.

During this documentary it became known, which we would also read in several newspapers in the then following weeks, that Ronan O'Rahilly had started his radiostation Caroline as he couldn't get his artists played on stations like Radio Luxembourg. To sum it up one name was the most important one, Georgie Fame, who was managed by Ronan O'Rahilly. Through the following decades countless documentaries as well as articles always mentioned this important fact.

Georgie Fame and his Blue Fames started their career way back in 1962 under this name after a period they had worked as a backing group for Billy Fury. It was around 2005 my wife bought for me a cd-boxset called: 'The Incrowd' in Germany and I learned that Georgie Fame and the Blue Fames were booked at the famous Flamingo Club in London in 1962 and became a massive success. And believe it or not, in the 44 pages booklet, which was published with the CD Box, it

was confirmed that it was not Ronan O'Rahilly who managed Georgie Fame and his Blue Fames but Rik Gunnell and so the group became the stars in the Flamingo Club.



In 2009 I lent a rare album from a music friend, an LP which was called: 'Rhythm and Blues at the Flamingo Club', featuring Georgie Fame and his Blue Fames. And at the cover it was mentioned too that Rik Gunnell was the manager and there was no mentioning at all for Ronan O'Rahilly.

Of course in all the stories about the sixties there are a lot of myths and research learned that the brothers Rik and Johnny Gunnell were well-known entrepreneurs and music promoters and are mentioned in most of the books relating music in the sixties. When Rik Gunnell died in 2007 at the age of 75 in one of the obituaries - the one by Val Wilmer - the next phrase could be found: 'Even in 1966, when Georgie Fame, his artist, was topping the charts for the second time, Gunnell could still be found outside the Flamingo, in London's Wardour Street, playing the tout, with a treble whisky-and-coke in his hand.'

The truth was that Rik Gunnell had booked Georgie Fame for his Flamingo Club and also made a contract to manage him. One of the guys who was plugging artist, including the then unknown Animals and

Georgie Fame, was Ronan O'Rahilly. So he had a minor role as always was mentioned in documentaries and newspaper articles.

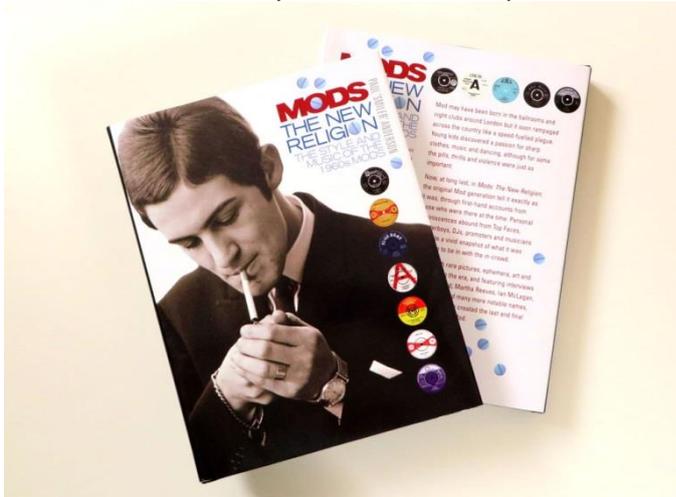
Then there were also several mentioning's of the fact that Ronan O'Rahilly was the owner of the Scene Club, also one of the important Clubs in the first half of the sixties in the City of London. Rumours were going he was only the manager there; others say he just frequently attended other people at the Scene Club. In his book; 'Radio Caroline, The True Story of the Boat that Rocked', Ray Clark wrote about Ronan and the Scene Club: 'He moved to London's club land in Soho, running the Scene Club in Ham Yard off Great Windmill Street. The Scene Club was dark, cramped and narrow, with a small bar, what passed as a dance floor and a stage too small for anything other than a DJ who had to make room for live bands and their equipment; consequently, it was very loud. Ronan O'Rahilly was also the manager for a number of artists at this time; he was certainly working with harmonica player Cyril Davis and legendary blues musician Alexis Korner.'

And about Ronan and the Animals he wrote: 'He helped to launch The Animals, but he and the manager had a split up and he always felt slightly resentful that he didn't get a slice of The Animals - but he was there at the birth.'

Relating Georgie Fame Ray Clark wrote: 'Keyboard player and vocalist Georgie Fame had a residency at the Flamingo Club and he also performed at the Scene, and it was Ronan's attempts to promote a recording of Georgie Fame that, he claims, led him to start a radio station: "I can remember well going round with an acetate of Georgie after I'd discovered that the BBC wouldn't play it at all because it wasn't on EMI or Decca, and I suddenly realised that the whole thing was locked up.'

Last year I bought a wonderful book about the Mods: 'The new religion. The style and music of the 1960s Mods', written by Paul

'Smiler' Anderson. One of the many artists interviewed in the book is Mick Eve, once member of the Blue Flames. Among other things he told the author: "We'd often to do the Scene Club at a Friday night. The Scene Club had around 250 people. The owner, Ronan O'Rahilly, paid us about 25 to 30 Pounds. Ronan was a good soul and gave us quite a few plugs on Radio Caroline, the pirate ship station that he also owned. He wanted to be Fame's manager but unfortunately it wasn't him who put the money for a new organ."



So a brand new Hammond organ had to be paid for, probably they hired one before. As Ronan did not give Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames the wanted 500 Pounds for a new organ they went on search for other possibilities. They found that at the Flamingo were Rik Gunnell paid for the organ and made a contract in which the deal with the organ and the management was arranged. However the Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames had to work very hard during the first weeks, almost having no money for a normal living.

Mick Eve: "Rik Gunnell lent us the money for a Hammond organ but that's where we fell into a trap. A Hammond organ in those days was about 500 Pounds. A fiver for a gig was like 50 Pounds these days, so the organ equated to about five grand!" So there it is, the story of a new Hammond Organ which taught us that Rik Gunnell got the management for Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames and not Ronan O'Rahilly as always has been told.

Maybe a final comment could be made about 'managing' as Paul Rusling wrote: 'Ronan worked with the Gunnel brothers on a number of promotions. I think he was therefore one of those who managed Georgie Fame but it wasn't his name on the contract. I'm sure the same is true if the lease on the Scene Club. Well, you can do a lot of managing (especially with Ronan's charm and dialog) without having your name in any papers. Ronan was always very careful about paperwork.'

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