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Flashback to the Groovy Sixties

[Jacqueline Lang](#) | [Showbiz](#) | November 1, 2012



Mick Jagger with Tony Norman back in the day

For lovers of rock 'n roll, London in the 60s was the coolest place to be.

The Stones, The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton were just some of the big names emerging on the scene. Rock writer Tony Norman was then a young dorky teenager, with a lot to learn about girls, and rock stars. After scoring a job on a hip music magazine, he suddenly found himself up close with idols like a young Mick Jagger.

*Now, after all these years, Tony has written a memoir, *My Cool Sixties - Lennon, Jagger & The Rest*, reflecting on this heady era which so influenced his youth. *My Cool Sixties* documents his time as a teenager, the rock stars he met, and the band he formed in a bid to be as cool as his idols.*

Tony Norman talks to **The Starfish**

Why did you write this book?

I've had over sixty books published worldwide, but this is the one I wanted to write more than any other. Why? Because it's about being young, free and single in London in the Sixties. A brilliant time when everything seemed possible.

Is the 60s your favourite musical era (and if so, why)?

Definitely. I loved the music then and I still do today. That's not to say I'm totally stuck in a time warp. There's plenty of good music around today like Coldplay, Snow Patrol and Ed Sheeran. But check my music collection and you'll find The Beatles, Stones, Who, Hendrix, Animals – all that good stuff.

Your book is your recollection of growing up in England in this exciting musical time. In a nutshell, how was it for you?

Brilliant. I was a music writer interviewing stars like Lennon and Jagger. In my free time I played bass in a Mod group called The Rest with my mates. We never hit the big time, but we had great times. We had a great comment on Facebook that said: I loved reading about your teenage group – you were the original Inbetweeners!

Did it have a profound impact on the rest of your life?

Absolutely. When I was a kid at school people told me I'd never make it as a writer. They said journalism was a closed shop. But I wasn't buying that, not in the Sixties when everything felt so positive, so I kept chasing that dream and finally got lucky. Growing up at that time gave me a mantra for life – all things are possible.

If you could go back to that era, what would you tell your young adolescent self?

I wouldn't try and change the younger me. We lived for the moment back then. We were naïve in many ways, and that's what made life exciting. It was all new.

How fortunate do you feel, having met and interviewed some of the biggest stars of the day?

I feel very lucky. I write about it in the book. Racing out to Heathrow to meet John and Yoko after their bed-in for peace in Amsterdam; getting the ice treatment from Jagger when I asked him about drugs; then seeing the Stones pay tribute to Brian Jones with a concert in Hyde Park. An amazing time!



John & Yoko

Have you run into Jagger since?

No, but I respect the Stones for still making great music 50 years on. I'm not surprised Jagger is still so fit because he trains like an Olympic champion. But Keith Richards is well, the man is a phenomenon!

As for John Lennon, people always talk about his mean side but I don't remember him that way. I interviewed John at Apple in 1969 for the Abbey Road album. I'd already met The Who, Stones, Kinks, Jimi Hendrix, but being face-to-face with my hero was a whole different ball game. I was nervous very but Lennon seemed to sense that and took the time to calm me down. I think he was a great bloke.

How did it feel to be in your own band back then?

I loved it. We were great mates and we still are today. One of the best things about My Cool Sixties was cutting a new track with The Rest. I wrote the song in 1966 and now we've recorded it to go with the book. Check out the video on The Rest page at our website. www.mycoolsixties.co.uk



The Rest in the Sixties

When you first sat down to write this book, you had a bit of trouble, didn't you? Then you found your voice. Can you talk us through this?

Yes, I started writing the book in the past tense and it felt all wrong. Then the penny dropped and I started again in the present tense, so the reader feels right there with me, meeting rock stars and playing all-night gigs in Soho with The Rest. Once I got into that groove, I loved writing the book. I was lucky a friend in my home town backed me. His name is Michael Baldry - cousin of 60's singer Long John Baldry - and when the recession killed a deal with a major publisher, Michael stepped in and made things happen. He believed in *My Cool Sixties* all the way. Rock photographers Barry Norman and Chris Walter really helped me a lot too. Their classic 60's shots conjured up the good times we all shared back in the day.

What's your life like these days?

I'm still writing, books and songs, and married to Melanie. We live on the south coast of England in place called Eastbourne. We've been here 40 years and our house is a five minute drive from the beach and South Downs. We love it.

Where do you work and what do you do; what sort of artists and music do you cover?

I work from home in my executive office block otherwise known as the garage! I write all kinds of music, but this year new songs keep coming to me inspired by the book. I'm also doing My Cool Sixties live shows, talking about the book and playing the songs unplugged. We've got a photo exhibition too, with exclusive shots of the Beatles, Stones, Who, Animals, Kinks, Small Faces etc We'd love to bring that to Australia for sure!

How does music today compare to the music you grew up on?

I'm not going to say Sixties music was better. I think the music you grow up with is special to you, whatever the era. But back then bands played live and paid their dues. Shows like The X Factor create instant stars and that can be a tough gig for the kids thrust into the spotlight.

Who's your favourite artist today?

Still the Beatles. Heroes then, heroes now. I play their music every day.

Favourite 60s song? Artist?

Strawberry Fields Forever. The Beatles. I went there on a misty winter's day in Liverpool, looked thru the famous red gates into the garden where John Lennon played as a child. Powerful moment: poignant and beautiful.

Where can we buy your book?

The paperback & 4-track EP are available worldwide from our website www.mycoolsixties.co.uk There's also have an e-book with 60s photographs plus six of my songs that link into the book. It's available in Australia from Apple (iTunes and iBooks). You can download it at Angus & Robertson too. (<http://www.angusrobertson.com.au/ebook/my-cool-sixties-lennon-jagger-the-rest/36139294/>)

We are also on Twitter [@mycoolsixties](https://twitter.com/mycoolsixties).

Who should buy it here in Australia?

As it says on the cover, this book is **For Adults Only**. I was young, free and single, playing in a Mod group in 60s London, at a time when the old taboos were fading fast. It was the age of free love, great music, great fashion, great times, and The Rest lived it all to the max. So this one's for adults. Definitely.



Tony Norman, fond memories of fab times