

‘ Twice Nightly ’

An Outline for a Feature Film

Roger Stennett



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‘Twice Nightly’ – A Proposed Screenplay

In the 1950’s world of entertainment, ‘**Variety**’ Theatre was ‘King’.

With performances twice nightly, the whole of the UK was full of theatre venues promoting a varied fare of Comedians, Singers, Jugglers, Ventriloquists, Speciality Acts, Performing animals, Magicians and the ever popular ‘tastefully scantily clad’ Chorus girls.

And **me**.

Back in the day I was a child growing up in backstage Dressing Rooms, in a labyrinthine world, out of sight of the general public. The only real ‘playground’ I knew, as my mum and I toured the country with my father, Welsh Comedian and musician Stan Stennett MBE.

He was to go on to spend 70 years in ‘Showbusiness’, but who, at the time of the film is set he was young performer, along with his two great friends, Eric and Ernie. Morecambe & Wise.

‘Twice Nightly’ is set in 1959, during a week run at The Swansea Grand.

In the 1950s, Swansea had two theatres, ‘The Empire’ and ‘The Grand’, where my father actually was in Pantomime in 1959.

But my proposed Screenplay is set in a Variety week, with both factual and fictionalised characters all interacting together.

Though rooted in my well-remembered childhood, the 10 year old Protagonist **PETER ROGERS** is fictionalised but based on me.

As is the character of his/my 35 year old Comedian and Musician father, **RAY ROGERS**

Both Protagonists interact with a Cast which includes **MORECAMBE & WISE** and Skiffle ‘king’ **LONNIE DONEGAN**, alongside a mix of performers, some of whom would go on to become household names in the new medium of Television.

While others were destined never to make the transition and fade away, back into the days of Music Hall.

The project feels important to me, personally and creatively. My very own ‘**Welsh Cinema Paradiso**’

feel I am in a very special position. I am both an experienced Dramatist and I was actually there.

There is still a huge interest in the popular theatre of the period, that has never been genuinely represented, not even by John Osborne's representation (with Lawrence Olivier) of comedian Max Miller in 'The Entertainer'.

As a footnote, my father taught Max Miller how to play the guitar.

Set over the space of one week, from arrival on a Sunday afternoon, through to 'get out' and rail travel, often via Crewe, on to the next town and venue, seven days later.

The Screenplay will examine what it was like to become a temporary 'theatrical family' for 7 days, only to be atomised, one week later, and join up with another group of fellow 'Pros', in another town far, far away .

The film offers an opportunity gently to lift the lid on an intriguing and often mysterious world of a Performer, with its own traditions, rules, secrecy and superstitions, as well as rivalries, jealousies, ambitions and a mutual and often 'hard-won' respect amongst a 'Band of Brothers' (& Sisters)

Some years ago I helped produce an hour long **BBC Radio 4 Archive Hour Programme** presented by my father which used extensive contemporary sound archive material from the BBC Archives to convey the impression my father was exploring backstage in a Variety Theatre of the 1950's, with occasional visits to the 'Wings' where we heard a range of performers from Max Miller and Arthur Askey to Sand Dancers, Wilson. Keppel and Betty and the comedian and 'fiddle player' Ted Ray.

The backstage world of Variety was not 'child-friendly', though it was inherently 'child fascinating'.

A place for busy adults, there were few other kids around, though I was friendly with Eric's son Gary Morecambe and remain so into adult life. Gary is very supportive of the proposed Movie

In a TV document he acknowledged the importance of the friendship between his father and Ernie, and my father, and the role it played in the duo's ultimate career path.

I often sought 'friendship' with other 'outsiders', notably a Chimpanzee called Gilbert owned by Hans Vogelbein who had been forced to downsize his performing creatures when one of his six Kodiak Bears lovingly hugged him, and broke all of his ribs.

Gilbert and I were frequent 'partners in mischief'

And there was always the innocent pleasure of being taken to the assorted 'bosoms' of the Chorus Girls, and being allowed to spend time in the warmth, exotic smells and spells of their Dressing Room, strictly out of bounds to all other males over the age of ten years old.

As well as looking at individual interactions with the rest of the cast, there is a narrative through line about an opportunity for one act to be chosen for a week's appearance at The London Palladium to appear on the Bill with American singing star **Billy Daniels**.

An understandable rivalry entered the Swansea week, complete with secretly secreted 'Whoopee Cushions' in Dressing Rooms when important Theatrical Agents came to call.

At the same time deep-rooted social issues existed.

The Second World War was not that long before, and a residual air of both anti-German and anti-Semitic sentiment existed even within the company.

Add to that some 'colour' prejudice towards a black American singer, mixed with sexual tension of a three-sided attraction.

All of this floated well above the tousled head of Peter Rogers whose primary motivation was playing with Toy Soldiers in the Dressing Room sink and trying to figure out a way to stop those pesky Chorus Girls kissing him on his pale cheeks, and leaving the crimson tell-tale evidence behind.

Blinking Girls !

At least Gilbert The Chimp was better behaved, and a dab hand at 'petty larceny' with his ability to 'Chimpanzee manhandle' slot machines on Mumbles Pier so old penny coins could be 'recycled'.

Not exactly 'Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid'. But close enough for Swansea.

The relationship between the boy and his father is complicated by the fact that Ray was a recent widower, and trying to raise his son 'on the job' with the boy looking for 'affection' anywhere he could

So many emotions, all hidden or revealed, beneath the Greasepaint and Carmine Rouge.

That's Showbiz !

Period, Place and Cast of Characters – Swansea 1959

The Summer of 1959 was long and dry. After the strains of the War the heavy industries of Coal and Steel and Copper were making were enjoying a buoyant time and Swansea, which poet Dylan Thomas called 'A lovely ugly town' was rebuilding itself ,after the devastating Swansea Blitz of 1941.

The citizens of the town enjoyed entertainment from two Theatres, The Empire and The Grand Theatre, both of which my father regularly played. T

This proposed Screenplay is set in the latter which still thrives today

Swansea was very much part of the Variety Touring circuit of Moss Empire Theatres as the hanging card shown later shows, and twice nightly performances would have been well attended, with shows preceded by the audience standing for The National Anthem – 'God Save The Queen – without complaint.

The format of the show would have been to mix comedy with spectacle with glamour and speciality acts. Most of the individual acts would have worked together in different combinations in different Theatres.

Human lives constantly recycled. That was the world of 'Variety'

CAST

Ray Rogers – 'Up and coming' Welsh comedian and guitarist. Age 34.

Peter Rogers – Ray's 10 year old son and a disciple of Dan Dare in 'The Eagle' Comic

Eric Morecambe & Ernie Wise – Up and coming act. Lancashire Comedians in their early 30's

Lonnie Donegan and his Skiffle Band – 28 – The 'new' musical sensation

Acrobats – Husband and Wife – 'The Eagles' – In their 40s. Creaking a bit

Magician and Knife Thrower – **The Great Stromboli** (50) and Assistant **Trixie** (25)

Arthur Andrews – 50s. Ventriloquist and his 'Dummy' – **Lord Haw Haw**.

Dudley Clarke – Song & Dance Man – 35 – African American. 'Matinee idol' looks.

Hans Manneheim – Animal Act . Early 50s. German. Formerly a Bear Trainer

Bryn Jones – Ageing Welsh Tenor and Poet - 50

Lesley Queen – Vivacious young Welsh Soprano - 30

Sarah Cohen – Jewish Accordion Player (25). Ingenue

Mrs Shufflewick – 'Female Impersonator'. 38 - Real character and 'spiky' person.

Sputniks – Dance Troupe – Six piece. Glamorous. Aged 18-22

Gilbert - The 'kleptomaniac' Chimpanzee. Ageless.

Stage Doorman – Bob Pickles. 60 year old Fireman. Injured in Swansea Blitz of 1941

Martin Jenkins - Theatre Manager. Vigorous and ambitious - 35

Ernie Cash – London based Theatrical Agent of Ray Rogers – 60

Mrs Gladys Pratt – Theatrical Landlady (50)



As was often the case, many of the Acts lived like gypsies, travelling in freezing Caravans rather than pay for 'digs'. These were often pitched on Bomb Sites, close to a Theatre venue.

In my Screenplay though we encounter the word of Theatrical Digs and Theatrical Landladies.

Peter and his father find themselves at the 'not so tender mercies' of Mrs Gladys Pratt with her Boarding House in Sketty, a stone's throw from the magical Cwmdonkin Park which was the Playground of the late Dylan Thomas

And there are other wonderful locations, including Mumbles with its Pier, and Gower where the beach went on for ever and a ten year old boy could be entranced with the legend of Worm's Head and the sweep of Rhossili

One of the challenges of a week's stay was to find something actually to do all day, especially for any kids.

The adults often played Golf or arranged Charity Football matches, while some tried to sublimate 'non-performance time' with alcohol or 'running around' with unsuitable 'companions'.

We witness individual storylines played out not just within the Theatre, but against the background of the sweep of Swansea Bay and the town and countryside of a Wales just about slip into 'The Sixties'.

With Ray having Peter to consider, his behaviour was responsible, but as a recent Widower he was also lonely and worried he could not be both father and mother to his boy, and happy when anyone else pitched in, and offered companionship, even if it was a Chimpanzee with some anti-social habits.

Most of the time Peter was happy living a 'feral life' backstage, negotiating the labyrinth passageways as if he was 'Dan Dare' from 'The Eagle Comic', or the mythical Greek Hero, hunting The Minotaur.

The world of Peter Rogers would seem alien to most kids today. Barely any TV to watch, and what there was being turned off at 6-00pm for an hour so that parents could put their kids to bed. Weekly comics like 'The Dandy' and 'Beano' and 'The Eagle' with the Space Commander 'Dan Dare' in colour. Chocolate

‘Selection Boxes’ at Christmas and ‘Subbuteo Table Soccer’ played on linoleum floors, and ‘Two Way Family Favourites’ on the Wireless, along with “Dick Barton Special Agent”.

And in Wales Peter heard his father on the wireless in ‘Welsh Rarebit’ and even accompanied him to perform a Sunday Concert in one of the many Butlin’s Holiday Camps and to collect the special metal Butlins badge from each.

And the distinctive music of the time on the BBC Light Programme.

Cliff Richard. Buddy Holly. Bobby Darin. Elvis Presley . Adam Faith and **Jess Conway** on his piano.

Even **George Formby**, with whom I once had Tea and Cake on his Boat upon The Norfolk Broads.

All of these artistes can form a rich and varied musical backdrop for the Film

Central to the Film is the developing friendship between Ray and Eric and Ernie. Their good humour and practical jokes and a shared interest in amateur movie making.

In reality my father filmed the first ever footage of Morecambe and Wise performing in Stage, and it will be a dramatic device to create and cut into the Movie suitably amateur footag

Another ‘device’ I wish to use is to take the short sound segments from my BBC Radio 4 Documentary and cut them into the soundtrack of the Film to give extra veracity and also symbolically to associate my late father with this modern tribute to the Variety world he so loved.

Key Outline Storylines

The complexities and individual interactional storylines for each character are known and will be set out in the Film **TREATMENT** and Beat Outline. As will indications of the pace and the Protagonist / Antagonist tensions, and details of all the ‘issues’ that crop up, and are resolved, over seven hectic days in Swansea

Essentially though here are some of the core themes.

Peter and his father, Ray . Adjustment to the loss of Ray’s wife/Peter’s mother. How Ray as a single parent manages to be both ‘father and mother’ to his wilful son while travelling and performing.

The notion of the Cast as a ‘transitory village’ helping to raise the boy.

Ray – Working hard to establish himself in Showbiz having come from a challenging back-ground and having been brought up by his grandparents after being born ‘out of wedlock’. His time in the Army in the

War was the beginning of his desire to be an Entertainer, as was the case with his contemporaries in uniform. Harry Secombe, Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers.

Morecambe and Wise. Friendly rivalry between the men, and especially between Ray and Eric. Actual 'back story' of Morecambe and Wise forms part of the pool of experiences from which we draw.

Lonnie Donegan and his Skiffle Band. Hugely popular performer and in some ways the forerunner of the 'Pop' performers of the soon to be 'Swinging Sixties' and who influenced John Lennon, Paul McCartney and The Beatles. Breakthrough in 1954 with 'Rock Island Line' which sold 3 million copies and was followed by No 1 Hits like 'Cumberland Gap' (1957). By 1957 he had 24 UK Top 30 singles and subsequent Rock musicians like Mark Knopfler and Van Morrison acknowledge a debt to him. In the Film we see him as a 28 year old from Glasgow, trying to make sense of what would soon be called 'super stardom' while playing, 'twice nightly', in provincial Swansea, and enjoying a life of sudden and confusing 'celebrity'

Acrobats – Eddie and Eileen – 'The Eagles' – In their 40s. Creaking a bit but still managing to 'tumble' and contort their bodies which finding a way to contort their increasingly strained marriage. Eddie loves to see his tall 'shadow' in the kindly spotlight, though the 'leggy Chorus girls' he secretly yearns after, tower almost a foot above him. Long suffering wife Eileen is quietly tolerant since she knows no other woman in her right mind would look (down) at him, twice.

Magician and Knife Thrower – **The Great Stromboli** (50) and glamorous Assistant **Trixie** (25). If Eddie The Tumbler has a rival in sexual self-delusion, it's our ageing Magic Man. Glamorous Trixie , his Assistant, buoys him up, not just professionally, but because he's actually her dad, and she promised her late mother she would. But it's worrying when Magic tricks keep going wrong, but even more terrifying when a 'Knife thrower' has ever dwindling eyesight and you, his daughter, are the 'target'. Trixie needs to 'get a life', while she still has breath in her unpunctured body.

Arthur Andrews – 50s. Ventriloquist and his 'dummy' – **Lord Haw Haw**. A svelte and Dinner Jacket clad "Vent" with a cut-glass, Upper class accent, his 'doll' "Lord Haw Haw" is a parody of the subversive English wireless propaganda character used by the Nazis to try to break the moral of the British people in the War. Ventriloquists are always rather odd and schizoid characters in real life, and for young Peter in particular there is a constant sense of strangeness around even the inert form of the 'character'. And it's strange when he overhears conversations taking place behind Arthur's closed Dressing Room door when Peter knows there's only one real person inside. Spooky.

Dudley Clarke – Song & Dance Man – 35 – African American. 'Matinee idol' looks. A real talent and total 'Ladies Man' The women adore him, and the 'not so subtle' allure of his 'difference' seems an aphrodisiac. Spent some time stationed in the UK towards the close of the War, he thinks he knows 'how many beans make five'. And probably does. Very much a sense of him 'earning his spurs' in Variety/Vaudeville before a return to the USA and a future in 'Movies'.

Hans Manneheim – Animal Act . Early 50s. Formerly a Bear Trainer but who had to become a Chimpanzee Act when 'Yoli', one of his six Kodiak Bears, lovingly hugged him, and broke all his ribs. An unhappy soul who claims he is Austrian, but isn't. A man for whom The Past is an intensely private affair, and who vaguely and rarely speaks of his 'reserved occupation' as ' A Milk Farmer' in Germany between 1939 and 1945. But who 'take his coffee' very black.

Bryn Jones – Ageing Welsh Tenor – 50. Originally from Merthyr Tydfil and who once possessed a ‘Chapel Pure’ voice. His voice can still touch the hearts and souls of the audience, but bit by bit, is being diluted through ‘water plus whisky’ added. A man of culture who loves reading and writing Poetry, not least the wonderful lyrical and narrative verse of Swansea’s own Dylan Thomas, who only passed away a few years before, in 1953.

Lesley Queen – Vivacious young Welsh Soprano – 30. She specialises in the romantic and sentimental songs of Welsh composer Ivor Novello her favourite being ‘**My Dearest Dear**’. As the week in Swansea develops it is interesting to see Ray Rogers waiting in the ‘Wings’ watching Lesley intently, as he waits to make his own entrance. Can unexpected ‘love’ possibly bloom ‘twice nightly’ in The Swansea Grand? And what would Peter make of that?

Sarah Cohen – Jewish Accordion Player (25). Ingenue. Vulnerable and damaged but full of a life force and energy that seems to be able to overcome adversity. Another character with a backstory that very seldom is revealed.

Mrs Gladys Shufflewick – ‘Female Impersonator’. 38 - Real character and ‘spiky’ person. Rex Jameson (1921-1983) a foul-mouthed boozy Cockney charwoman. Her act was a precursor to modern drag legends like Lily Savage. A frumpy floral dress and battered hat, delivering risqué jokes and rude monologues with a Razor sharp wit. But essentially a hugely lonely bi-sexual character.

Sputniks – Dance Troupe – Four piece. Glamorous. Aged 18-22. A youthful energy running through the Film. ‘**Cheryl**’ and ‘**Meryl**’ are sisters. Both Welsh, from Port Talbot. ‘**Rachel**’ is a troubled soul from a Home Counties family, who is determined to rebel, and ‘**Nicky**’ is determined to be a Film Star, one day, and prepared to do whatever it takes to get noticed. Even in Mumbles. Between each of them, as individuals and a group, they are a wonderfully anarchic force throughout the Film. Each of them adores Peter, who they all try to treat as a ‘pet’!

Stage Doorman – Bob Pickles. 60 year old Fireman. Injured in Swansea Blitz of 1941. Becomes a real friend to Peter and tells him tales of the War and Bombers and Fires, and makes little origami models with silver paper from cigarette packets. He loves to tell the Peter scary and melodramatic stories about The Theatre Ghost and the pitch dark and rat-infested Orchestra Pit

Martin Jenkins - Theatre Manager. Vigorous and ambitious – 35. Sees The Grand as a stepping stone towards a London Theatre like Shepherd’s Bush Empire or maybe even The Palladium. Middle man between the performers and Owners, he thinks he needs to exercise ‘authority as befits ‘Management’’. A weak man who is hiding his own demons.

Ernie Cash – Ray’s London based Theatrical Agent – 60. Ernie is the archetypal Jewish Agent who looks upon Ray as the ‘son’ he never had. He believes he can do no wrong, and Ray in turn looks upon Ernie as the father he never knew.

Gilbert - The ‘kleptomaniac’ Chimpanzee. Very much a “simian partner in crime” for Peter. Not exactly ‘Clyde’ from Clint Eastwood’s film ‘Every Which Way But Loose’ (1978) but still an animal ‘empath’ and someone/thing to whom Peter can confide, and with whom he feels he can safely shed a tear. Comic relief, Gilbert also personifies a great sense of ‘unsaid’ but not unexpressed ‘compassion’.

‘Let’s call a spade a spade’

A pair of ‘Buggers’, actually.

Roger Stennett – Screenwriter

Welsh Poet, Dramatist and Screenwriter

My first Stage play was produced in London in 1976, since which I have had productions ranging from Youth companies to The Bristol Old Vic , The Royal Exchange and The Royal Shakespeare Company.

My Screenwriting includes Animation, Documentary, Teleplays and Feature Films.

I have written widely across several genres and also mentored and tutored Creative Writing to postgraduate level in Universities including Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol, Cardiff and Manchester

I currently am working with Welsh Producer, Mike Young, on my Screenplay “ **On My Way To Hollywood** “ about the Poet Dylan Thomas and an Opera he was intending to write with the Composer Igor Stravinsky.

‘On My Way to Hollywood’ has a Budget of £ 8 million (\$ 10 million). As has ‘Twice Nightly’

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Mike Young - Producer

Over the last 40 years, Welsh born Producer Mike Young has established himself as a major force in the world of Animation and Live Action, with his Los Angeles based Studio and Streaming Company **Kabillion** creating Series and also streaming Animation into millions of homes. From his world-wide success story with his character **SUPER TED** right up to the present, Mike is a major force in the Entertainment world, both as an Independent Producer and in co-productions with Studios and Streamers such as Universal, Lionsgate and Netflix, with Productions generating many millions both on-screen and in merchandising.

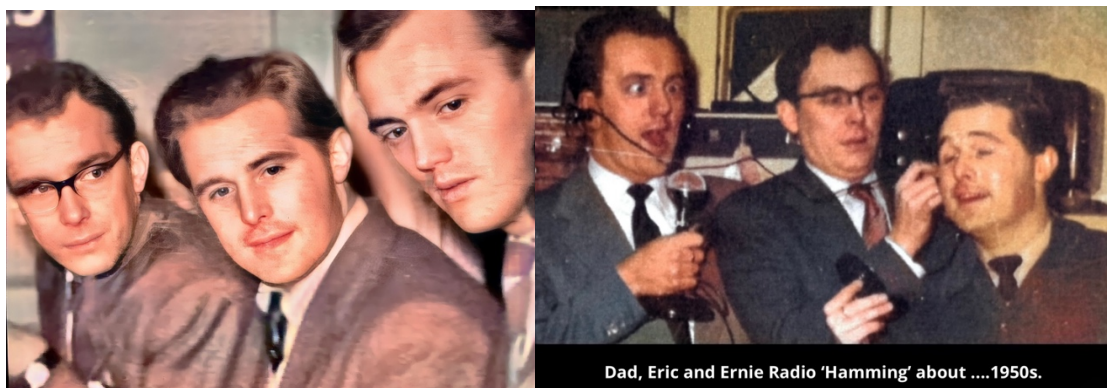
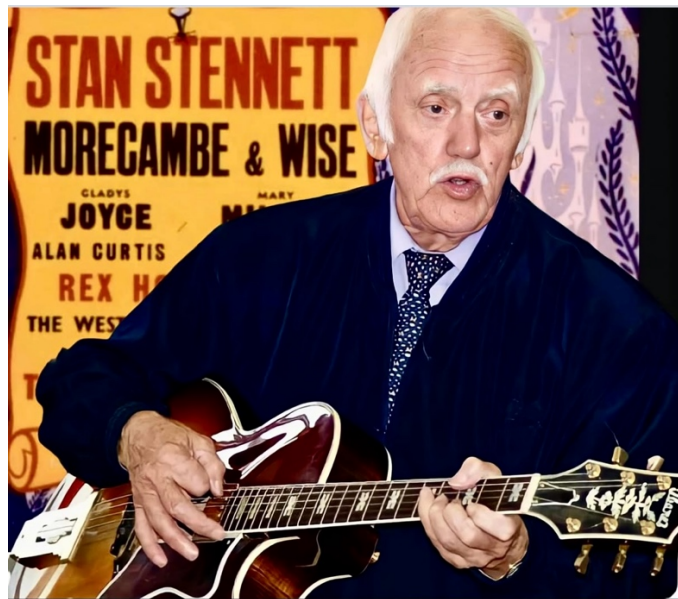
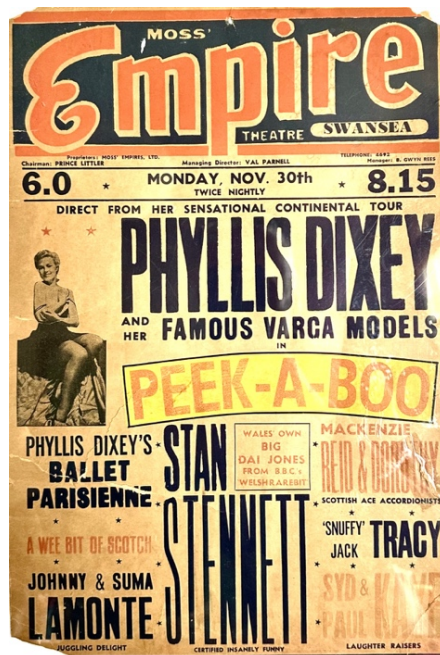
Along the way Mike has gathered 2 BAFTA Awards and 15 Emmy Awards.

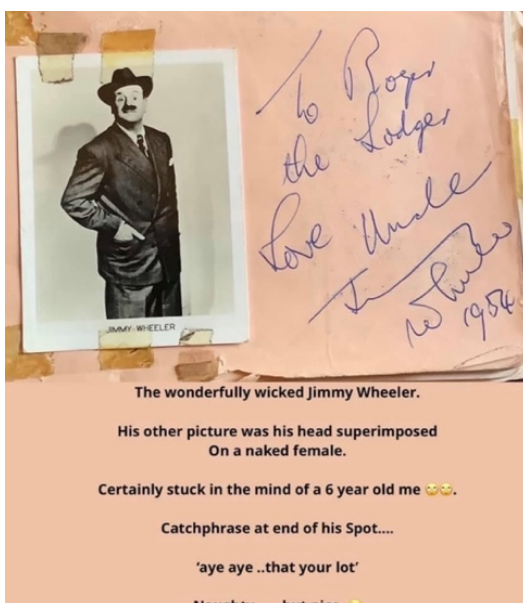
Mike enthusiasm for both of Roger Stennett’s current film projects has been hugely important, as has his determination to keep both British ‘Indies’ and to source the majority of finance from Wales and the UK.

The creative friendship between Roger and Mike goes back 40 years, in Animation and Live Action film.

June 30, 2026

Some Images





The wonderfully wicked Jimmy Wheeler.

His other picture was his head superimposed
On a naked female.

Certainly stuck in the mind of a 6 year old me 🤔.

Catchphrase at end of his Spot....

'aye aye ..that your lot'

Naughty but nice. 🤔



A charity football team in Blackpool
With not one, but two Players called Stan. 🤔





Rhoda Rogers



*Sincerely Yours
Marian Dore*

We lived
In Caravans.
Sometimes
I think
No Gypsy
Could
Have
Dwelt
There more.

Following
After
Dad's
Shows,
We trundled
Our home
Like a Snail
Carries
Its shell.

But
Unlike
Gypsies
I could not
Foretell
The Future

*The Day the
Sun Shone in
Blackpool
Summer 1957*

**Blackpool
1957**

**Roger
Stennett**

'Still looking for that Cowboy Sunset'

Double exposure. Sixty five years ago.
The ghostly lady is Doreen Wise,
Ernie's wife. She was nice and pretty.
I recognise her kind face right away.
Backstage, Derby Hippodrome. 1953
I'm four, and that's my metal horse
That went everywhere with me,
Rode the Ranges of all The Empires,
Coliseums and Grand Pavilions,
Millions of miles disappearing
Beneath its clattering tin hooves.

I rode him hard. I rode him fast,
Watered him in the Dressing Room sink,
Rubbed him down with a yellow duster
Dad used to use to cover his guitar strings
And galloped in my mind, leaving behind
All 'grown-ups' in my dust. 'Adios Amigos'.

I was 'Roger The Dodger'
Loads better than 'Billy The Kid'
And all these long years later,
Still looking for that
'Cowboy Sunset'.

Roger Stennett

STAN STENNETT

The Stan Stennett Fan Club.

Name Roger Stennett

Address # Heol Madoc
Whitchurch, Cardiff.

Age 5 1/2

Usual Signature *Roger Stennett*

This membership card is valid
From 1955 To 2055

MEMBERSHIP NO : Hon. Mem. No. 1.

Stan Stennett
(Stan Stennett, President)

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who is a member of the S.S.F.C.
to see Stan Stennett back-stage
at this theatre if convenient.

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