

Sixties pop singer forged new musical path with function band

Dorian Gray of pop refuses to fade away

By **JENNA PUDELEK**

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A SIXTIES recording star who went on to front a successful function band is celebrating 50 years in the pop world.

Tony Ellingham, who was born in Gravesend and now lives at Lordswood, near Chatham, rose to fame in the late 1960s under the name Dorian Gray.



DORIAN GRAY: Tony in Sixties pop star days

He entered the Top 50 at number 37 with the single I've Got You On My Mind, which stayed in the charts for seven weeks.

Taking his stage name from Oscar Wilde's tale of a young man who never grows old, he went on to perform on Top Of The Pops and the Simon Dee Show.

Now 67, Mr Ellingham still performs with his band Unit Five, which formed in 1974.

Enjoying a relaxing day out with his family at the seaside at Birchington, he reminisced to Kent on Saturday about his long musical career.

"I started when I was 17," he said. "With the hit record, I had just moved into a new house, my wife had a baby in February and I was on Top Of The Pops in March."

"My boss at a printers in Rochester gave me six months off to do it. I was 26, and you've got to be young, free and single really. I had too many responsibilities."

"I did enjoy it though. It was a fantastic time and something I'd always wanted to."

Mr Ellingham's single charted in the days before Radio 1. Most pop music was played on pirate radio stations operating from ships offshore.

He said: "My record was played like mad on the pirate stations and was selling in six figures, which would have been enough to make it number one, but then the Government took the pirate stations off the air."

Although his time as a solo artist was brief, Mr Ellingham did appear on Top Of The Pops along with Cilla Black, The Hollies and Tom Jones.

Of his decision not to continue as Dorian Gray, he said: "In those days you never made the money you make now."

"We went to see Stereophonics at Margate Winter Gardens recently and were lucky enough to meet them. I don't think they could quite believe that we never got paid [well]. They were sitting there as millionaires and couldn't get their heads round it."



HOW MUCH?: Stereophonics were stunned by how little Tony Ellingham earned as a chart star in the 1960s

"But you didn't worry about it so much then – you just wanted to be seen."

At the time he shared an agent with Roger Day – a former Radio Caroline DJ who now has a show on BBC Radio Kent – Stevie Wonder and the Beach Boys.

Mr Ellingham went on to set up his function band, Unit Five.

He said: "It's a night out with the boys that you get paid for, and we're still friends after 35 years."

And modern pop music? "I love it," he said. "I like Stereophonics and The Killers."

"We [Unit Five] try to keep up to date."

"If you are a function band, wherever you go there are around 400 people there of all ages some in the late 20s and early 30s and they look at us and think, what are they going to play?"

"We do Abba and a little bit of that sort of stuff too." And Mr Ellingham has no plans to retire from Kent's music scene.

"My wife keeps joking, asking me when am I going to pack up," he said. "I do get more tired these days, but I'm still enjoying it so we'll keep going."

For more information, go to www.unitfive.co.uk.



TOM JONES



CILLA BLACK



THAT WAS THEN: Tony and Unit Five in their Seventies pomp, including drummer Reg Kean, who died six years ago



UNIT FIVE: From left, front, John Humphrey, guitar; Andy Jenkins, drums; second row, Phil Thompson, keyboards; Nigel Beckett bass; back, Tony Ellingham

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