

# Leave it to Me

Don Murfet



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# CHAPTER ONE

*1963 – 1994*

## LED ZEPPELIN

‘Bonzo’s dead,’ said a shaky voice on the phone. It was Ray Washbourne – the PA to Peter Grant, Led Zeppelin’s manager.

The enormity of his words took a few moments to sink in. And then that cold fact took its grip on my guts. I was sickened. John Bonham was such a lovely bloke; I’d been through so much with him...It was a shock. But there was no time for grief – not yet. But maybe I’m starting at the end? Before going into John’s tragic death, I’ll explain how I came to be involved with Led Zeppelin and how I had come to be so close to that legendary band’s members.

\* \* \*

They say first impressions last – and that’s certainly true of my first encounter with Peter Grant. The name Peter means ‘rock’, and no-one ever epitomised ‘rock’ – in both senses of the word – like Peter. He was physically huge; an enormous hulk of a man, a former wrestler who, on that fateful night in 1964, had landed the job of Road Manager for the evening’s show at Edmonton’s Regal Theatre. With wild American Blues legend Bo Diddley and the latest teen sensations, a louche and motley bunch of kids called The Rolling Stones, on the bill it wasn’t going to be an easy ride. But old Peter was a rock in the face of any crowd, no matter how unruly. And, as I was to find out later, he was ‘rock’ personified in other ways too – notably in his unrelenting passion for what

became known as ‘rock ‘n’ roll habits’. But more of that later...

I wasn’t exactly uninitiated in the esoteric ways of the music business behind the scenes and I’d turned up to take care of someone else on the bill: Tommy Roe, who’d just scored a big hit with *Sheila* and who was represented in the UK and US by G.A.C., the massive American agency into which my mentor Vic Lewis had tied his own London firm. Used to breezing my way unquestioned past Security to the backstage area, I strolled through the front-of-house and made my way easily to the pass door (the door at the side of the stage leading into the auditorium that was a feature of all the old theatres). There I was accosted by this towering giant with piercing eyes and a Mandarin-style moustache and beard who growled, ‘Who are you and where do you think you’re going?’

I gave him my name and humbly explained that I there was there to look after Tommy Roe and after a painfully long and, on my part at least, very tense pause, the future legend shrugged and let me pass with a gruff, ‘OK.’

Sad to say, the strikingly vibrant Regal Theatre’s days as a Rank cinema, concert hall and focus of local social life are long gone. Like so much that we took for granted as part of the rock ‘n’ roll life’s rich fabric, it’s been torn apart and now, where guitars and drums rang out almost nightly, you only hear the ring of cash registers. No longer Regal – it’s now a lowly local supermarket. Thinking back on it, I and associates like Peter Grant, Don Arden, Mickey Most and countless others were incredibly lucky to have been starting out in the music business in the mid-sixties – a time now acknowledged as one of the most creative, vibrant and innovative that British rock ‘n’ roll has ever seen. At the time, though, like the people who saw no heritage of great import in the old Regal Theatre, we just saw every epoch-

making event as another 'day at the office'. If only we'd known the significance of the times we were living in – and our impact on them!

It may not have seemed the most auspicious of introductions, but increasingly my life was to become intertwined with Peter's – and those of the bands with whom we both became associated. Within a year or so I found myself sharing the same London business address – 35 Curzon Street – with Peter and a whole gang of blokes whose names now read like a Who's Who of major music business figures: Don Arden, Vic Lewis, Micky Most, Pat Meehan, Barry Clayman, Ken Pitt, Alan Blackburn, Don Black, Barry Dickens, Irene Korf, Colin Berlin and Richard Cowley.

I was still working for Vic – and Peter was the road management supremo for another soon-to-become-legendary rock figure: Don Arden. Don was one of the new and seminal breed of band promoters that the Sixties sired – dynamic, charismatic, creative and often even more outrageously flamboyant than the artists they looked after. With a fast growing stable of the hottest, brightest stars, including The Small Faces and Black Sabbath, Ozzie Osbourne's Birmingham rockers, who were to become the definitive 'Heavy Metal' act, Don was something of a star himself. Incidentally, his daughter Sharon later managed and married Ozzie. And the more he shone, the more trouble gravitated towards him, wherever in the world he showed his face. Which, of course, was why he needed to be surrounded by brick shithouses of men like Peter and his equally imposing colleague, Pat Meehan. No matter what he got up to, you simply didn't cross Don Arden – and over the years there were many who rued the day they'd tried. One hapless accountant springs to mind. He made the (almost literally) fatal mistake of mismanaging Arden's financial affairs in the

early 70s. Don and his son David weren't the types to call the cops. They called the shots.

I don't recall exactly what that poor accountant's fate was, other than that he was held prisoner for a while – but I'm sure their vengeance was swift and terrible. It was certainly illegal, because David ending up doing time for it and Don fled to the States, just out of reach of the long arm of British law. As Arden's right hand man, and a force to be reckoned with in his own right, Peter was a formidable character – and one you definitely wanted on your side. Although I never had any business dealings with him, I always got on well with Don Arden and found him great company.

Another nascent manager/producer star saw the value of having a man of Peter's magnitude in his orbit – and soon Peter was installed at the Oxford Street offices of one Mickey Most (now sadly departed) and Ron Madison. Mickey was riding his first wave of success – and it was a big one. Not only was his record label, RAK, immensely successful with hits by the likes of Donovan and Herman's Hermits but he was also handling seminal acts such as The New Vaudeville Band and, crucially, The Yardbirds – a group whose success at this stage was to lead to undreamable prosperity in the future for Peter.

Things were taking off for everyone around me – and by late '65 I thought it was time I struck out on my own. I knew all about the hassles the most popular acts faced – and the three most important of them were security, privacy and transport. With my new venture I was going to solve all three at a stroke, fill what I saw as a gaping hole in the market – and, with a bit of luck, fill my pockets at the same time!

I was right. Artistes Car Services, as I christened my new enterprise, was an immediate success. The core of the idea

was to offer performers a genuinely luxurious ride to and from their concerts with a minimum of fuss and total, uncompromised security and discretion. This proved to be exactly what the new breed of pop stars needed as their fans' adulation began to feel like persecution. That year some very big people rode in our sumptuously appointed limos, including The Beatles and Donovan among many others in an increasingly galactic list that began to read like a Who's Who of British rock 'n' roll. But undoubtedly the biggest arse to grace the seats of my fleet of cars was that of Peter Grant! From 1966 onwards he relied on us to get his fledgling acts from A to B (and often via C and D and all the way to Z!) and back again without incident or embarrassment. Of course, that meant we saw each other on a regular basis and, with so much in common, it was almost inevitable that we became close friends. What it really all boiled down to was trust. A simple thing, you might think – but a rare and valuable commodity in that exciting, yet frightening dog-eat-dog time and place. Ultimately, Peter knew that he could rely absolutely on me – and, by association, on the team of level-headed, broad-minded, strong but utterly discreet men I employed. The old-school rule books had gone out of the window and he knew we could cope with any of the bizarre problems this new untamed form of showbiz could throw up. More importantly, he knew we could make them go away.

Nevertheless, it soon became apparent that many of these problems were actually of Peter's own making – certainly he increasingly involved us in circumstances that had little to do with our original remit: chauffeuring the artists to the gig and back again and protecting them all the way. Drawn into all sorts of disputes from run-ins with the authorities to 'withdrawing' illegal bootleg albums from record shops, I found myself in the dubious role of Peter's personal 'troubleshooter'. I suppose it was a compliment really. It

showed his utter faith in my integrity – a faith that was, though I say it myself, completely justified. However, over the following years, it embroiled me in difficult personal, even intimate, situations that, often, I could have done without - even if Peter had convinced himself that he was merely acting in his artists’ best interests. For example, if a band member lost interest in a particular girlfriend, it was our job to make her *persona non grata* and ensure that she was no longer on the scene. Cast-off groupies were ‘cleansed’ from the band’s entourage with ruthless efficiency - the unfortunate girl concerned would suddenly find that the backstage doors and party venues that had once magically opened for her were now firmly closed - and often slammed - in her face. But it wasn’t only people who were intimate with the band who we had to remove. Sometimes Peter simply took an instant dislike to a face in the crowd for no apparent reason. Ours was not, as they say, to question why, and it was down to me to get the unfortunate owner of the face he’d taken exception to removed. Of course I tried to elicit some sort of rationale from the great man as to what constituted a ‘threat to security’ – but in the end it was a lot easier to just ‘do it’ than to try and reason with him.

All the hassle and heartaches paid off handsomely though when Peter asked me to take on the Road Management duties for the forthcoming US tour of his new management signings – The Jeff Beck Group. It was quite an honour. Probably the first ‘supergroup’, the band comprised four established faces (two quite literally!) who were destined for a place among the greatest in the history of rock ‘n’ roll: former Yardbirds guitar hero Jeff Beck, of course, future Faces and Rolling Stones strummer Ronnie Wood on bass, new boy Tony Newman on drums and a fresh-faced former grave-digger with a voice that sounded like it was made from the gravel he dug – one Rod Stewart. Like everything else in the music business in those days (and right up to this day I suspect) the

job description of Road Manager was an elastic one. I imagine even the uninitiated would expect it to involve overseeing the hotel bookings, flights, shipping, trucking, setting up, soundchecking and breaking down the PA, lighting and staging at each venue. In fact most of that would be handled by the Roadies themselves – and the Road Manager would only get ‘hands on’ when there were problems to sort out, such as equipment going astray. Less obvious are what you might call ‘ancillary’ duties – and they were often the least predictable, most onerous and prone to disaster. There were disputes and fights to settle, bills to pay, concert promoters to harangue and haggle with over percentages of gross and ‘dead wood’ to keep an eye on (‘dead wood’ was the unsold tickets, which had to be meticulously checked because they were our only means of verifying the number of tickets sold – and therefore the percentage owed to the band). And then there were services of a more personal and often illicit nature that are always in demand with a rampant rock group pumped full of adrenaline and testosterone after a great gig. I’m sure I don’t need to spell out the exact nature of such missions! Suffice to say I jumped at the job and threw myself into it wholeheartedly as always!

I’d already met Jeff Beck some years before – he’d turned up at the office in his pre-Yardbirds days several times while Vic Lewis was courting him for a management deal. Jeff had recorded a single called ‘That Noise’ and CBS were keen to sign him but he hesitated before signing just long enough to get another offer. As you can imagine, Vic was gutted when ‘the one that got away’ joined the Yardbirds and began his meteoric rise to stellar status. That single never saw the light of day – and nor did Vic’s hopes of managing Jeff Beck. It turned out that Vic’s loss was Peter Grant’s very lucrative gain – and it was my baptism of fire in the sheer madness and barely contained anarchy that was life on the road in the

States with one of the original hair-raisingly hedonistic rock supergroups.

I didn't meet the rest of Jeff's boys until our rendezvous at Heathrow. Like a dog urinating to mark out its territory, I knew I had make my mark immediately – stamp my authority on the lot of them. If I didn't I might as well not get on the plane. I should explain that some of the Road Manager's more banal duties are also the biggest nightmares. Like coaxing a hideously hung-over musician from his hotel bed and getting him onto the plane/tour bus/stage on time. They don't thank you for it and a lot of the time you had to be the 'bad guy'. In fact at times I felt like some kind of satanic scoutmaster!

The high jinks started almost the second that the plane levelled out at cruising altitude and the seat belt lights went out. The boys were in a particularly playful mood, like a bunch of schoolboys on an outing with teacher – although considerably less innocent. They seemed set on testing me; goading me to see just how far they could push me and at times it was hard to tell the playing up and play-acting from whatever would pass as normal behaviour in the unique world of a successful rock musician, which is, as far as I can tell, one gigantic amusement park. I took the wind-ups and pissing about with good humour until suddenly the atmosphere of levity dropped like a... well like a Led Zeppelin... Young Rod was squirming in his seat, clearly overcome with nausea. As he clutched his stomach in agony and gagged and heaved those dry retches that make everyone around feel sick too, a couple of concerned fellow passengers got out of their seats and rushed to his aid. Right on cue he shuddered, convulsed and spewed forth a torrent of evil-looking grey vomit all over his would-be Good Samaritans. Bet that was the last time they rushed to the assistance of an unruly rocker! It turned out that the disgusting globby mess

that splattered out of Rod the Mod's mouth wasn't vomit at all – just an unpleasant papier maché of superstar spittle and the paper he'd been chewing up since take-off. Not, I imagine, that this was much consolation to the people whose clothes were soaked in it!

Unfortunately that was just the start. They got down to some serious drinking and some bright spark suggested a game of 'Kelly's Eye.' What that involves you really don't want to know. OK, maybe you do! Here's how it worked. One of the group, sitting in the window seat (which is important) would call out weakly for a stewardess (and they were generally female in those days. Somehow the game wouldn't have the same appeal these days with as many males as females in the flight crew). When the stewardess arrived and asked what was wrong, the occupier of the window seat would mumble incoherently in reply. So she'd lean forward, cocking an ear to hear what he was trying to say. He'd groan something equally unintelligible under his breath. Keen to do her duty and help an ostensibly sick passenger, she'd lean further forward, now almost prone across the aisle seat. He'd gasp helplessly. And what the hapless stewardess took to be the whimper of a seriously ill man was actually the strain of stifled laughter – because the further she stretched over, the higher up her thighs her skirt would ride and the better the view for the rest of the group, ogling enthusiastically from behind. I don't think the name of the game needs any further explanation! And from there things went downhill fast. Halfway into the flight the band were considerably higher than the plane that carried them. Their raucous laughter, shouting – screaming even – was getting out of control. And it was out of order. It was time, I decided, to draw the line. Not the kind of line usually associated with rock stars – but it certainly got right up their noses! Ironically, the relative newcomer to rock, Tony Newman, was by far the most obnoxious of the four. So I decided to single him out – make

an example of him; lay my cards on the table and see if he'd call my bluff (and it really, really was not a bluff!).

I lunged across the aisle and loomed over the back of his seat – and my face was right in his face, livid with pent-up fury. The hearty guffawing instantly shrivelled to the sheepish titter of chastised schoolboys (or boy scouts).

'Listen you!' I roared at the top of my voice, 'Two of us can play this game – and I don't mean Kelly's bleedin' Eye! We can do this tour two ways. I could make it hard for you – really hard – or...we could learn to work together!'

It worked. I suppose that when my words sunk in they thought about just how unpleasant I could make their life on the road – how their post-gig sexual and chemical proclivities could be curtailed by a martinet of a Road Manager bent on laying down the law to the letter of their contracts. They had little option but to toe the line for a while. I'd made my point – and made my mark. Temporarily at least, I'd tamed the wildest of party animals and for the rest of the tour The Jeff Beck Group were, if not exactly model citizens, admirably civilised. They'd learnt a valuable lesson from that little *contretemps* – and more importantly, so had I.

That Jeff Beck tour set the tone for my future life on the road. The hassles, the chaos and the loose cannons would be the same despite that fact that in my career I've worked with a diverse range of artists that includes Led Zep, David Cassidy, Adam and the Ants and The Sex Pistols among many others. In the end, as I learnt, the musical trends may come and go but that quintessential rock 'n' roll attitude, like the song, remains the same. And long may it stay that way! Frankly, it wouldn't have been much of a challenge if I'd been in charge of a bunch of choirboys – and nor would it have been as lucrative!

The attitude was a constant – and so were the hassles. They might be different in their precise nature, but I learned to anticipate the unexpected so that in the end there wasn't much that could shock or faze me. I became an accomplished 'firefighter'. When things got heated I cooled the situation. When tempers blazed I extinguished them and when bands' self-destructive urges looked like making them crash and burn I usually managed to control the fire without losing the vital spark that made these guys legendary. I think it was Neil Young who said it's better to burn out than fade away – well I'm not so sure, but I certainly got the impression that most of Zep (with whom I was to work later on) and the Jeff Beck Group would have gone along with that philosophy! Sadly, there were to be times when I couldn't prevent a great talent from falling prey to his own volatility and unquenchable lust for excess, more of which later...

A perennial problem that always rankled with the acts was when greedy agents booked them into venues that were entirely unsuitable – in terms of size, access, acoustics or even sheer mortal danger for fans and performers alike. One of Jeff and the lads' gigs was a perfect example of the bookers' total lack concern for their performers' image and style of music. To their horror they found that they'd been booked to perform at a kids' summer camp – one of those places where American parents dump their stropky teenagers for the school holidays. Playing to an audience of thirteen and fourteen-year-olds was not a job for serious rock musicians – that was for children's entertainers and cutesy pop performers. To say the band were unhappy would be an understatement – and, when the inevitable on-stage shenanigans started and they began to treat the gig as little more than a private party, the organisers and their charges were unhappier still. Always the wild card, Tony Newman abandoned his drum kit and kept up the percussion as he staggered from table top to table top by banging his sticks on

anything that would make a noise – bottles, pipes, chairs, you name it. At least he stopped short of banging out a paradiddle on a teenage head – well, at least I think he did! And then Jeff and Woodie joined in. Not to be outdone by their drummer's antics, they picked up a fire extinguisher and liberally doused the first few rows of the audience with foam. Talk about dampening the audience's spirits - sheer bloody pandemonium broke out! The organisers were evidently not amused. As they picked up the phone to call the police I realised that it was time for action. The ability to think on your feet is one of the first attributes anyone should look for in a prospective Road Manager – and I pride myself on the number of scrapes and brushes with the law I got my bands out of over the years. On this occasion a quick getaway was called for – my speciality!

I bundled the band out of the hall and into the waiting Limousine as quickly as I could and the sleek stretched motor screeched out of the compound in a mad dash for the state line and immunity from arrest. We made it in the nick of time – but that wasn't much consolation to my assistant, Henry (the Horse) Smith, who'd had to stay behind with the truck and all the band's gear. When the cops arrived they didn't see the funny side. Quite the contrary, in fact, because they were determined to confiscate anything they could lay their hands on in an attempt to force the band to come back and face the music. And when you consider the vast value of a major band's touring technology, we probably would have had no alternative but to turn ourselves in and cough up the fines and/or backhanders, if not face jail sentences, to get it all back. But the appropriately named Henry had horse sense. He claimed that all the equipment belonged to him and that he'd simply lent it to the group for the performance and didn't expect to ever see them again. Unbelievably the police swallowed the story and let him – and the band's equipment – go free. All we lost was Ronnie's bass guitar and a few

odds and sods – not that that stopped the boys sulking about it for a day or two! I've had better times – but few of them were entirely without some kind of incident...

...Like the Jeff Beck Group's gig at Schenectady Hall in upstate New York, for example. It seemed that things were really looking up when we heard that Peter Grant's latest managerial signing – Led Zeppelin – were also on the American east coast at the time on their inaugural US tour and arrangements were quickly made for the two bands to hook up for some serious partying. Led Zep and the Jeff Beck Group – talk about an explosive combination!

Those two now legendary bands may have been volatile – but their signing was a major coup for Peter. The downside, for Peter and for me was that great talents are notoriously 'too hard to handle', as the song goes. In Beck, he had one of the world's greatest guitarists and a proven record seller – temperamental, often stroppy but always ready to pull a rabbit out of the hat. In the end, though, it was Zeppelin that was to be Peter's great cash cow – and one he'd take to rich new pastures and milk for all it was worth.

Right from the off, everyone knew that Led Zeppelin was a cut above the rest of the rockers – a true supergroup in the making. Formed by Jimmy Page, one of the key songwriter/producers of his generation, from the ashes of The Yardbirds, Zep blended vintage blues and heavy rock with consummate musicianship and made all those elements add up to something far greater than the sum of their parts. Added to Page's prodigious talents was lead singer Robert Plant. And what a find he was! An imposing handsome blond Viking of a man whose sex appeal was as powerful as his thunderous, yet soulful and vulnerable voice. John Paul Jones on bass was no less gifted – both at laying down the deep, throbbing basslines that melded the Zep sound together and

at laying the countless women that fell willingly at his feet. And then there was Bonzo on drums. I would grow to love John Bonham (that was his real name) dearly. He was a good - even great - man; a funny man and a great friend. He was also one of the wildest I've ever known – and I've known some very wild men in my time, as you can tell from other chapters in this book! I'd describe him as a playboy – but the term has too many suave and pretentious associations to sum up an irrepressible character like Bonzo. He was a walking bag of contradictions: a gentle soul who was nevertheless the epitome of the 'wild man of rock' with an iron constitution capable of withstanding his prodigious and insatiable appetite for booze and drugs. His formidable drumming was the kingpin of Zep's musical direction and rightly made him a rock legend – but his offstage antics were equally hardhitting and were to become equally famous.

Given their origins, it was almost inevitable that media interest in the band verged on the rabid – even before the release of their first album. And if the critics were a little sniffy about them at first, the live audiences fell in love with Zep at first sight and sound! America was similarly smitten, thanks largely to the heavy radio promotion of *Whole Lotta Love*, (later the Top of the Tops theme for many years – and recently revived in that role!).

Anyway, Zep were coming along on The Jeff Beck Group's tour bus to the Schenectady Hall gig – but it soon became clear that they weren't just there to appreciate the performance. Richard Cole, their notorious Road Manager, lost no time at all in getting up to mischief with the rest of Zep following his lead. While Jeff, Rod, Ronnie and Tony were grooving away on stage the majestic Zep boys held court in the dressing room with numerous excited females in attendance. Knowing their reputation, you'd have thought it would be John Paul, Jimmy or Bonzo who'd make the first

lecherous leap on the compliant assembly of girls – but no, it was Richard Cole. When a pleasantly plump, rather innocent-looking girl walked shyly through the dressing room door in search of her rock gods, Richard lunged at her and literally swept her off her feet, spinning her upside down and rubbing his face lasciviously in her crotch. And that was just for starters. For all I know she enjoyed it – but I’m pretty sure the victims of the next little prank weren’t at all happy.

One of the boys, unnoticed in a corner of the dressing room, decided to urinate into a big jug of Coca Cola – and, as you’ve probably guessed, he offered this foul tainted chalice to every hapless girl who stepped tentatively into the room in the hope of having some contact with her heroes. Poor girls, I thought. It wasn’t funny. Just crude. And cruel. But it wasn’t the worst abuse of these innocents who threw themselves at the rock ‘n’ roll animals they lionised. I’d just about had enough of that kind of behaviour and had stepped outside with Peter for a breath of fresh air – both literal and metaphorical – only to walk straight into a distraught young girl as she emerged from the toilets in floods of tears. Clearly grateful to find two potential knights in shining armour, she turned to us and wailed, ‘There’s a guy in there who’s just been groping me!’

Fired up with righteous indignation, Peter and I stormed into the toilets (or should I say ‘Rest Rooms’ since we were in America!) and immediately confronted the groper – who was about to regret the sexual assault bitterly because he, and I, were introduced to Peter’s celebrated ‘kicking trick’. This involved taking the terrified bloke by the scruff of the neck and kicking him in the shins, again and again. And then again and again. And again. And again - boot cracking against bone with a rhythmic precision that Bonzo would have been proud of. This treatment was followed up with Peter’s other mode of administering punishment – namely a stiff four fingers shoved into and under the ribcage, which really takes your

breath away! As I've mentioned, Peter was a whale of a man, about six foot two and weighing in at something over 300lbs. A kicking from Peter was like one from a carthorse – and one that the groupie groper wasn't going to erase from his memory or his shins for a helluva long time! After a minute or so, that must have seemed like a lifetime to the groper, Peter finally laid off, dragged the guy's limp and crippled form to the door and hurled him through it like the sack of shit he clearly was. Unlike a sack of shit, however, he actually bounced off the floor before hauling himself painfully to his feet and wobbling off, dazed and confused, in the immortal, and accurate, words of the Led Zep song. The message came over loud and clear: urinating in a bottle was one thing, but nobody messed with Zep's fans when Peter was around, whether they were male or female.

The two bands' paths were to cross several times over the next few days as their respective tours wended their way across the States – but it was at the Singer Bowl, a massive sports complex doubling as a concert venue just outside New York's Flushing Meadows that things really came to a head. Jeff and the boys were supporting America's flavour of the month, Vanilla Fudge. More significantly, as it turned out, Alvin Lee's new band, Ten Years After, were opening the star-studded bill. The Zep boys and their entourage said they'd be there to lend Jeff a bit of moral support. I thought that was quite touching to begin with – such selfless solidarity between two of the UK's best bands while they were touring on foreign turf. But of course it wasn't as simple – or as innocent as that. Nothing ever was! Hindsight being 20:20, maybe I should have sussed that there was more to their eagerness to attend than geeing their mates along. In fact that had nothing to do with it. The Zep boys were there to get their own back on Lee for some pretty nasty remarks he'd once made about Jimmy Page – and Jeff Beck's roadies seemed happy to help them wreak their revenge, egged on,

inevitably, by Bonzo and Richard Cole. Chick Churchill – one of Ten Years After’s associates – was unlucky enough to be caught without backup in a locker room by a vengeful rabble of roadies who scared the crap out of him before ruthlessly stripping him of his clothes. Then they stripped him of his dignity by dumping him naked and trussed like a lamb to the slaughter in the starkly lit corridor outside.

Next it was Ten Years After’s turn for the revenge of Zeppelin. Hidden in the anonymity of the shadows in a corner in front of the stage, the Zeppelin crew pelted Alvin Lee mercilessly from the moment he took the stage with anything that came to hand – including hot dogs, burgers, orange juice and probably much messier and more painful missiles. It was glorious! Lee and his band had no idea who the mysterious assailants in the shadows could be. The shower of debris stole their thunder, undermining the storming performance they’d had their hearts set on and, understandably enough, mediocrity was all they could muster.

In retrospect, Peter and Jimmy – the two partners in crime – had to be behind this. It was their way of saying, ‘Don’t ever mess with the Zeppelin!’

If that had been the sum total of their retribution for an off-colour comment, I guess it would have been ‘fair dos’. But they’d already planned a masterstroke that would add insult to injury. Of course, as far as the audience was concerned, Led Zep’s joining The Jeff Beck Group on stage was an impromptu jamming session. I knew different! Having ruined Alvin Lee’s set, a band that hadn’t even been booked to play was about to steal the show. And steal the show they did. But even the Led Zep boys hadn’t planned the finale that was to be the highlight of the night!

Bonzo had been at the backstage booze. Nothing unusual about that – or about the fact that, drunk as a lord, his drumming on the fast blues the galaxy of rock stars was playing was as blisteringly bang on the nail as ever. What was a bit unusual was the fact that he'd suddenly decided to do a 'Full Monty' while he was at it, still hitting that kick drum with mechanical, maniacal precision and venom despite the strides and underpants tangled round his ankles. For most of the audience, the sight of his private pubics made public was just a bit of a Bonzo bonus to the already exciting event.

But, among the ogling crowd, some punters were less impressed at the sight of Bonzo's manhood flapping about on the drum stool. I clocked one humourless woman talking animatedly to one of the fairly heavy local police presence. Like a chill wind, the prudish outrage swept through the crowd and it was clear to see that the cops were not amused. Now I'm not saying I'd normally think Bonzo getting his kit off was going too far. On the contrary, high spirits and outrageous behaviour like that are the all part of the sheer joy of rock 'n' roll – and long may it stay that way. A few people will always be upset by it - but when the police are among the ones with the hump, that's when the fun stops and the trouble starts. Of course, it was my job to make sure it didn't.

I could see the cops rallying together, conferring and calling for backup. I had to get Bonzo off the stage before they could arrest him. Suddenly I had a plan. I took Henry the Horse aside and told him to kill all the lights the moment the performers finished their song. He did so, plunging the stage into darkness for about ten seconds – just long enough for Richard Cole and I to grab Bonzo by the arms, pull his pants up and drag him full pelt backstage. Obviously we couldn't hide him in the band's dressing area – that was the first place the cops would look for him. So we lugged him into another locker room nearby which, since it was fully equipped with

shower facilities and suchlike and plastered with sporting paraphernalia, I assumed was an American Football players' changing room. Somewhere out there, the police were stumbling about in the darkness, their mood turning as black as the blackout we'd plunged them into.

I kicked the door shut and locked it. Hearts banging as loud as Bonzo's drumming and holding our breath in case we were heard, Richard and I set about tidying up the legless sticksman. We waited. Bonzo, by now, was unconscious, draped lifelessly over a chair, marooned helplessly in the empty tiled expanse of the backstage changing room. The distant rumble of angry men echoed along the corridors outside – then suddenly loomed uncomfortably close. And then there was an explosion of outraged voices. At first it was an incomprehensible babble. Then it was way too close and way too clear.

'Where is the dirty motherfucker?' one loud American voice kept roaring with an authority that cut through the general furore. At least, I thought, we were safely locked in this room. No one could hear us. Bonzo was temporarily out of the game. Keep schtum and we'd be in the clear.

But then there was a thunderous banging at the door - the kind of banging that won't take no for an answer. The door burst open to reveal five or six huge cops with waists as wide as their minds were narrow. Some traitor must have given them the master key. We were outnumbered, out muscled, outweighed and, most importantly, outlawed.

Richard and I stood in front of Bonzo in a forlorn attempt at solidarity – as if we could hide him; protect him. Two of the police posse strode forward – too close for comfort, intimidating, demanding to know if this was the drummer who'd just given his public a public performance (not that they put it that delicately!).

‘Look, he’s just drunk – he’s harmless,’ I spluttered. ‘Look at him – he didn’t mean any harm...’

The cops looked with distaste over my shoulder at the inert figure sprawled over a chair in the middle of the bleakly lit and Spartan room. Neither was impressed. Their collective sense of humour bypass was obviously complete. I suppose it wasn’t much of an excuse. It can’t have been - because then they whipped out their batons threateningly, making it utterly clear that they meant business.

To be honest, at that point, Richard and I had given up the ghost. We were all going to get nicked and that was that. But neither we nor the cops had reckoned on a far superior authority. I’d thought the police had made a fairly impressive entrance just minutes ago. But the door through which they’d marched with such self-righteous import suddenly exploded open to admit the furious and fighting mad figure of Peter Grant. He was always almost ludicrously huge – but fluffed up, furious and bristling with rage like a giant Mother Hen hell bent on protecting her chicks he almost took the door off its hinges. The door wasn’t the only thing almost unhinged by his entrance: the cops clucked in panic – overshadowed and overawed and chickening out completely.

‘I’m the manager of the band,’ Grant boomed imperiously. ‘Who’s in charge here?’

The gobsmacked police officers silently pointed out their Captain, whose eyes met Peter’s and were fixed in his glare.

‘You and me need to talk – alone.’ Peter said quietly. ‘Get your men out of here.’

With a wave of his arm the Captain dismissed his troops and Richard and I followed suit – we didn’t need telling. Closing the door carefully behind us, we left Bonzo, Peter and the Captain in the room and waited. And waited. And waited.

Finally, after about ten minutes that seemed a lot longer, the Captain emerged, all that anger drained from his fat face, and

beckoned his men to follow. Bemused, we gingerly stepped back into the locker room, where Peter greeted us with a smile.

‘Well done!’ he beamed. ‘Now, let’s get Bonzo on the bus.’

I didn’t need to be told twice. I grabbed the still-prone Bonzo and hauled him bus-wards and within minutes Peter and Led Zep, complete with their semi-conscious drummer, were speeding out of town. No charges. No arrest. In fact, it was as if the incident had never happened. I was in awe of Peter’s unique brand of diplomacy that had somehow convinced the outraged cop Captain to let the matter drop. It was amazing the authority that guy commanded. Maybe it was his sheer size and physical presence...Well, that and the sheer size and physical presence of his wallet – as I found out when I asked Peter later on the bus.

‘That was a cheap get-out, Don!’ he laughed heartily. ‘It only cost me \$300!’

So now I knew how Led Zeppelin did business – and how the big man made problems just disappear. It was a lesson I’d take to heart – and which would take me to the very heart of the stellar supernova that Zeppelin were about to become.

The irony was that the quiet, understated style of getting things done that I’d developed for myself was sometimes at odds with Peter’s methods. The further their balloon went up, the more money there was sloshing around – and Peter’s preferred way of dealing with problems was to throw money at them. And that may have taken the edge off tricky situations – but it also brought a whole new range of complications. Despite – or maybe because of – his unquestioned authority within the rock ‘n’ roll sphere, Peter was drawn to people who had power of other kinds. He seemed to be influenced by anyone who was ‘connected’ – whether in government circles or in the underworld. One gentleman – although I’m not sure the term is accurate in this case – seemed to hold particular sway over Peter. Herb

Elliott. That was his name. Ex CIA or ex-Agency, he appeared on the scene after a huge US tour that Zep had just completed and he soon became instrumental in smoothing the band's way through the States. The powers that be move in mysterious ways and this Herb guy was clearly connected. As if by magic the band had police escorts on demand and incidents such as that Singer Bowl debacle were ironed out and wiped away without the need for negotiation.

One time outside Peter's favourite London hotel – the Montcalm at Marble Arch – I spotted three dodgy looking men in a car, who were definitely staking out the hotel. Naturally, I mentioned it to Peter and Herb.

'What make of car? Registration?' Herb asked in a flash.

I told him – having made a mental note of the licence plate just in case. Herb left the room purposefully and was back in ten minutes.

'It's OK. They're police – but they're looking for someone else,' he said with an air of confidence that could only come from a man with some serious contacts at the highest level...

\* \* \*

Maybe here's the right place for me to go back to the beginning, where, you may remember, I opened with the tragic end of John Bonham.

'Get down to Jimmy's and take care of things,' Ray had said in that awful phone call to tell me Bonzo was dead.

'OK, leave it to me, I'd replied. And I knew from long experience that Ray and Peter Grant wouldn't have called if the shit wasn't about to hit the fan. I had to get down to Jimmy Page's place sharpish. It was down to me to contain the situation, limit the damage – and that probably meant keeping the police and the press at bay.

I put the phone down, grabbed my keys and in minutes I was out of my office in the NOMIS complex in Sinclair Road, W14 and gunning my BMW onto the A4 and speeding west for Windsor, where Jimmy, the prince of rock's royal family, had a palatial mansion, the Old Mill House in Mill Lane, Baggott (incidentally, formerly owned by Michael Caine) - a stone's throw from another royal household: Windsor Castle.

My mind raced faster than the car's screaming engine. John's dead. How? Was it accidental? Did he suffer? What about Pat...And Jason, his wife and son? That frantic half-hour's drive was on auto-pilot as a cascade of John's larger than life exploits flashed through my mind - fleeting recollections that made me smile despite the Bonzo-sized hole deep in the pit of my stomach. This tragedy was the latest in a run of bitterly bad luck for the band. Whether by sad coincidence or something more sinister, the Grim Reaper had been knocking at Zeppelin's door much too often for comfort of late - as I was reminded when I stumbled breathless into the guest room at Jimmy's mansion to find Bonzo's body, lifeless on its side where Benjy le Fevre, his personal roadie, had put him to bed after his drinking session, having taken care to prop his back with a bolster to ensure that he couldn't roll over and choke on his own vomit. The central heating had been left on but later someone had opened the windows - and it was the fresh air, I was told, that had caused the strange discoloration of his face. It was as if John's life and soul went out of the window as the fresh air blew in.

Arriving at around noon, I'd beaten the police and press to the scene. Professionals to the end, the roadies - Benjy and Rex King - and, Jimmy's manservant Rick Hobbs had already 'cleaned up', by which they meant that they'd got rid of anything potentially incriminating or embarrassing to the band or John's family. The one thing even they couldn't conceal or control, though, was his blood - and whatever that

contained would be revealed in the post mortem. To the uninitiated that might sound impressively level-headed and professional; but to a seasoned roadie it's pretty much standard procedure; as routine as tuning a guitar and placing the monitors correctly – especially if your man indulged heavily in all the usual extracurricular rock 'n' roll habits! And there's no denying that John Bonham indulged – in fact he was the epitome of the wild man of rock, modelling himself on his boyhood hero, the late, great Keith Moon. It transpired that the boys had been rehearsing that day and Bonzo, characteristically, had been hitting the vodka hard – at least four quadruples, by all accounts as well as who knows how many speedballs, the last of which was to be John's final hit. But, ironically, it wasn't that heady mix of coke and smack that killed him. Tragically, despite Benjy's diligent precautions, it was later found that John had vomited and inhaled at the same time in his deep drunken sleep, setting up a fatal siphon effect whereby the contents of his stomach were pumped into his lungs.

Shaking off my initial shock, I took charge of my emotions – and then I took charge of the situation.

You have to be pragmatic at times like that. It was too late to do anything for John – and I could take care of his family later. Right now, damage limitation was the name of the game – and the first threat was the police. I briefed everyone in the house: keep your mouths shut and make sure the cops confine their investigation to the guest room. They must not be allowed to nose around the rest of the house! I didn't know what they might find – but whatever they turned up, I was sure it wouldn't do the band any good. And once the press got wind of it they'd have a field day - especially since Bonzo was the second visitor to have died in one of Jimmy Page's guest rooms in just over a year. In fact that earlier incident served as a sort of rehearsal for this latest tragedy...

On October 24th 1979 Paul McCartney's company, MPL Communications, hired us to provide men to check the guest list and handle the overall security at a very prestigious award ceremony that The Guinness Book of Records was holding at Les Ambassadeurs nightclub just off London's Park Lane. Everybody who was anybody was there, including the press, paparazzi, liggers and jibbers (jibbers are people who blag their way into gigs, receptions or backstage without a pass or invitation), largely because Paul was being presented with a medallion cast in rhodium (which is a very hard, silvery platinum-like metal element) by a government minister. I was just checking out the members of Pink Floyd when one of my men said that there was a call for me upstairs (obviously this was a long time before the advent of mobile phones!). At the reception desk I found the call was from Ray Washbourne – and it wasn't the best of news! They'd just found one of Jimmy's guests dead at his home at Plumpton Place, Sussex. Predictably, he wanted me to get down there and take care of things.

'I think someone may have phoned for an ambulance,' he said, 'but that's all I know.'

'Leave it to me,' I said before telling Gerry Slater, my business partner, what had happened and taking off like a scalded cat.

I arrived at the same time as the police. Obviously that was because they'd been called out by the ambulance crew – which is standard procedure. Their presence meant that I couldn't 'clear up' the way I'd have liked to. All I could do was confine their investigations to the guest room where the guy, whose name I later found out was Richard Churchill-Hale, had popped his clogs. And that annoyed the cops intensely! If I'd arrived ten minutes later they'd have been all over the house like a rash – so I was very lucky, timing-wise. I didn't get a chance to 'clear up' completely so they did find

‘substances’ by his bedside. It transpired that the poor bloke had overdosed – but because he was a guest, staying in a guest room, the room he slept in was where the police’s snooping stopped...

Anyway, going back to Bonzo, I knew that the press would hound his family pitilessly – and that simply wasn’t an option. I had to keep a lid on it for as long as I possibly could, at least until Peter turned up and started throwing his weight around – and, as demonstrated that time at the Singer Bowl, that was a lot of weight to throw!

The police weren’t happy about being stymied at every turn. But what could they do? It was apparently an accidental death – nothing suspicious about it. A drunken man had seemingly inhaled his own vomit - period. There was no good reason for them to snoop around, no matter how much they’d have liked to. Anyway, it was the law – they knew it and so did I. Funny how rock ‘n’ roll makes lawyers out of everyone involved – just like crime!

Sure enough, by the time Peter and Ray arrived and John Bonham had ‘left the building’ for the last time in the ambulance, the road had filled with reporters and the mob was growing by the minute as the circling vultures homed in on the smell of death. The three of us discussed all the angles, analysed the kinds of problems that might ensue, made contingency plans and decided how we would box for the next few days. That resolved, Peter and Ray went off to console the boys in the band. It was only after his unusually subdued departure that it dawned on me that Peter hadn’t been in his normal control-freak manager mode. Far from it – he was obviously deeply shocked by the event and, after our preliminary talk, left the whole affair to me to deal with.

At least I didn't have to worry about the rest of the band – they'd made a hasty departure minutes after John's body had been discovered and I'd arranged for more of my men to go and look after them until they were safely ensconced in secure retreats where there would be no intrusions. That may sound callous. It wasn't. It was, again, standard procedure. When there was a 'death in the family' unwritten rule number one was to make sure that the band were as far away from the action as possible. It meant fewer questions for them to answer. But more importantly it allowed them to grieve in private, protected from the press (which in such situations might as well be an abbreviation of pressure!).

The platoons of press and police set up camp at The Old Mill House for days. So I did too. I hardly left Jimmy's place for the following few days. Keeping the hounds at bay was a full time job and a hard one, with the more dogged photographers climbing over the walls – and driving me and my men up the wall in the process. There were a few little incidents – but nothing I couldn't handle – and I managed to contain the situation as effectively as anyone could. Maybe I shouldn't have bothered. They'd caught the whiff of a story that was a tabloid hack's wet dream: rock star, booze, drugs and death – and if there wasn't any sex they'd find a way to work some in. So, if they couldn't get the story from the horse's mouth they'd let their imaginations – and Led Zep cuttings archives – run riot. Predictably, they added that Ol' Black Magic to the lurid mix, concocting ludicrous fantasies involving Jimmy Page and his admittedly strong interest in the occult in general and Aleister Crowley in particular. For example, he owned a house that had formerly belonged to Crowley and in which there had allegedly been a terrifying catalogue of murders and suicides. The place was also apparently haunted by the spirit of a man who'd been decapitated there some three hundred years earlier – all lurid grist to the newspaper mill!

Having been so close to so many famous people whose lives had been blighted and hacked to pieces by the lies and sensationalism of the gutter press hacks, I knew exactly what they'd do to John's memory, given the chance. They didn't care whose feelings they hurt as long as they could drag up enough dirt to muddy the issue – because they know mud sticks. Any little association, any name, any snippet of gossip or unsubstantiated innuendo would do if they could cook it up into a tasty dish for their hungry public. I wouldn't mind so much if what they printed were true – but in my experience they get it wrong most of the time and hurt people more than they'll ever know. But they never, ever apologise. Worse still, they never, ever, seem to care. Luckily enough, because John was so well-liked by his friends, there were very few new revelations about him. In fact, it's a tribute to his friends' loyalty and integrity that all the press could do was dig up and rehash old stories.

Despite the press, I at least partially succeeded in controlling the way the whole tragic affair was perceived by the public by keeping a lid on everyone involved and ensuring that they didn't disclose anything. And now I faced another, far more unsettling, task: to make sure John looked his best for his swansong show for all the family and friends who wanted to pay him their last respects. To do him justice, the mortician needed to know what this vacant frame had been like in life – larger than life was what Bonzo had been. I found a photo that captured that free spirit we'd lost and made an appointment at Kenyon Morticians in Kensington – at which I duly arrived, full of trepidation.

After polite introductions in the office, I was ushered into the area where the bodies were stored, silently awaiting their burial or cremation. It was cool like...well, like a morgue really. I, on the other hand, wasn't cool at all. I was chilled to

the bone when the mortician reverently drew John out of what looked like an oversized filing cabinet – the one where they file your life when it’s no longer current. Desecrated by the autopsy and horribly discoloured, this wasn’t the Bonzo I’d known and loved. John’s wasn’t the first dead body I’d seen and wouldn’t be the last, but that didn’t make that ‘death mask’ any less mortifying. I was calmed, though, by the mortician – a kind, congenial and fascinating man – who soothingly discussed the whole mysterious process of his profession with me. It’s a tribute to his professionalism and integrity that when he looked at John’s body, having talked about John with me and examined the photo I’d brought along, he saw him through my eyes. He explained the way he would use make-up and style his hair and assured me that by the time he began his quiet sojourn in the Chapel of Rest, John would look peaceful and serene – and no-one would see any sign of the autopsy or the discoloration that had so disturbed me. Bonzo, peaceful and serene. That’s a first, I thought.

A consummate professional in the art of sending people gracefully to their final rest, he was just as skilled in bringing peace to the living – and, having put my mind at ease, he shared some of the intimate and touching aspects of his craft. In another ‘file’ was another body – that of a sixty-year-old Greek or Cypriot woman. She was fully clothed and looked as if she’d just fallen asleep. But it had been a very long snooze because, amazingly, she’d been dead for nearly two years. Evidently her husband had requested that they kept her there, perfectly peaceful and preserved, until he died – which apparently would be soon – so that they could make their final journey together; go home to be buried in their own country. And this wasn’t a one-off – he told me he’d once kept the body of an exiled African head of state for more than six years because his family was waiting until their country’s political climate changed before they could take him home

and bury him in his native soil. I found myself moved by the reverence with which this gentle man accommodated people's last wishes in God's departure lounge. There couldn't have been anyone better to administer this art to John: a great and talented artist performing his art for another great and talented artist.

A few days later I returned to see his handiwork and my faith was fully justified – John had been transformed. He looked lifelike – perhaps better than he'd looked for several years. All his confusion and conflict was resolved; the stress and strain relieved. He just looked bloody handsome and, finally, the wild man of rock was completely at peace.

I phoned Peter to tell him that the funeral arrangements could go ahead and also that people could now go and pay their last respects. John was to be buried near his home at Rushock in Worcestershire, where he had lived with his wife, Pat, and Jason, his son.

My involvement in John's demise had been a tragedy in three acts. Act One: the death scene at Jimmy's house. Act Two: the Chapel of Rest. Act Three was the funeral – and again my own grief had to be put on hold because my team and I had been employed to ensure that it would be a dignified and respectful occasion, unsullied by intrusive press or fans. It was the last meaningful thing I could do for John – and I was determined to do that sad duty well, despite the irony that 'quiet and dignified' were hardly what the wild man would have wanted. What he definitely would have wanted, though, was for Pat, his beloved wife, to be spared any more stress and strain than she was already suffering. And that, I'd make sure of – for Pat, for Jason and for John. My lads and I met, appropriately, at John's favourite watering hole just opposite the graveyard where he was to rest, to toast him the way he'd

have wanted us to. In fact Pat made a remark that June (my wife) and I will never forget.

‘From his grave, John can see this pub, so he can see us celebrating his life as he would have wanted us to.’

With that deeply moving thought in mind, I reluctantly left John’s close family and many other friends – many of whom were my friends too – to say their final goodbyes while we prepared to fortify the church against the inevitable onslaught.

Security was just one aspect of the operation. There were more sensitive duties to deal with too and I’m proud to say that the busload of my men I brought in did an admirably discreet and respectful job and behaved impeccably. You’d never have known that their background was in the rather less formal world of rock ‘n’ roll – but it was clear that their solemnity and dedication to the job was inspired by the fact that most of them had worked with Zeppelin at one time or another. They acted as ushers for the collected family and friends and were invaluable in helping to receive and lay out with due solemnity the innumerable floral tributes that poured in. Of course I made sure that the men were strategically placed and blended in – the last thing we wanted was for them to look oppressive, like a bunch of bouncers. And to their credit they blended with considerable diplomacy and aplomb. In the pub, then before, during and after the service, they kept the hordes of press, autograph collectors and souvenir hunters at a respectful distance with nothing more dramatic than a wagging of fingers, a meaningful look and a shake of the head that said ‘that’s a no no!’. The respect with which the onlookers treated the proceedings was impressive – particularly the national press boys, who aren’t renowned for their sensitivity. Mind you, they weren’t behaving themselves out of any sense of decency! Just to make sure they behaved, we had quietly pointed out that if they took any liberties on that day they’d pay dearly for them

in future. They knew we were the boys in charge of most major rock 'n' roll happenings they'd want to cover and took the warning to heart – as well they might – and were on their best behaviour.

That day a cornerstone of one of the world's greatest bands was lowered into the ground – and the lack of Bonzo's unbeatable beats undermined Page, Plant and Jones. Soon they announced that they felt they couldn't go on without him. It was the end of an era. Yet another rock legend had succumbed to the lethal cocktail of self-doubt, temptation and adulation that only the great stars ever sample. Because when you're very, very high there's a very long way to go down. John was history – and so was the band. History in the real sense of the word.



Adam talking to his fans in 1981, flanked by myself and Dave Moulder.



Me trying to persuade The Pig she'd look better with a pork pie hat and sunglasses for the *Ant Rap* video







The typical fans' reaction when they catch sight of Adam Ant or the group.



Yours truly being used as a stand-in while Adam practised for the *Friend or Foe* video



Me revisiting the Scrubs 44 years after my first visit. I like this view better!