

**So** ..... The nice lady who looks after the Website said that she thought a little of my history would be of interest..... Why??? Who knows??? But always willing to agree to a lady's request, here goes>>>>>>>

It started with a schoolboy bet. When I was 12 years old, my schoolmate Mick said that the first one of us who could play a tune on a guitar would be paid sixpence by the other. We both wanted to learn, so I took up the challenge. A couple of weeks later, I was the proud owner (well, not really, I borrowed the £14 from my big brother) of a guitar and a copy of the Burt Weedon book "Play in a Day." Taking the title seriously, I played "Jingle Bells" within the suggested 24 hours. I won the bet (don't think I ever got the sixpence, though).



Learning guitar became very important to me, and I spent most of my spare time trying to play it. I couldn't go out anywhere as all my pocket money went on paying back Big Brother!!! Over the next year or so, Mick and I started a group (they weren't called bands in those days); it was called "The Cosmics." Why??? Cos Mick suggested it! Mick moved away from Lincoln (my hometown) as his dad had been promoted at work and had to move to "that London." We carried on with "Big Brother" playing drums and another school friend on guitar. We played at youth clubs and so on. We even did a booking (they were called gigs much later) at a real working men's club—for money—£3 between us! We had made the big time, in our minds anyway.

Things moved on, and Big Brother and I were asked to join a singer and guitarist who was quite popular in Lincoln at the time. We did, and The Johnny Jones Trio was born. By now, me being at the ripe old age of 15 (plus a few months), we were asked to take up a residency at a new Lincoln nightclub. We were there to play the poppy songs and Rock 'n' Roll while the "professional" piano, bass, and drums trio backed the main visiting artists, such as Petula Clark and Jackie Trent (accompanied by husband Tony Hatch), to name but two. Imagine this young 15+ whippersnapper (who shouldn't really have been allowed in the place at that age) talking music with Tony Hatch! Crickey, he wrote the theme tunes for Neighbours and Crossroads!!!

**Monday nights, the club was closed, so all the Lincoln musos would get together at the City Club, a sleazy backstreet drinking club. It was the only place open late on Monday nights! Reg Conroy, the pianist from our resident nightclub, was a little bald-headed old man (to me anyway; he was probably about 50) who looked as though he didn't have an ounce of rhythm in his body. He would go along, and I have to say I will never forget his influence on me, giving me a better understanding of playing music for singers to sing to than anyone before or since.**

**It was at these late-night Monday sessions that I met my soon-to-be partner, Vic Case (his then "stage name"). He was a popular solo singer with lots of experience (he was 27 to my then 17). We (or more like he, with me saying "yes" a lot) formed "The D'Arcy Brothers." This duo, with his (I have to say) great voice and my guitar and backup vocals, hit the Midlands club circuit. Managed by a well-respected Nottingham entertainment agency, we were kept very busy for the next 5 years, playing most nights of the week in either social clubs or nightclubs, or both, and being on the same bill as some well-known artists of the time. Some were household names then and now forgotten, and some are still remembered.**

**It all sounds like great fun, and it was. But, contrary to popular belief, it was also very hard work. The times we heard the comments, "It's ok for you, you only do an hour or so every night!" That's just the bit you see!!!!**

**There are great memories of the times coming up to Yorkshire pit villages on sunny Sunday mornings to do what was known as a "Noon and Night" at Miner's Welfares (a show at lunchtime usually with just the men there to see if t'turns were good enough to bring t'missus for the same show at night). As we arrived in the villages, there was invariably a brass band playing (no, not for us!!) but that sound on a sunny Sunday morning will stay with me forever! Clubs then in the 60s were basically a follow-on from the old-time music halls to provide a good time when work was over and as theatrical as they could make it. It was during this time that I realized what a life the miners had. Bloomin' hard graft in the worst conditions imaginable—there was no wonder that they expected their entertainers to work hard for their applause!!!**

Time moved on, and Vic, due to health problems, decided to call it a day. It may have been the end of his entertainment career, but a 22-year-old with now quite a lot of experience was not about to quit. It was at this time that, taking my first two names and leaving out the un theatrical “Creasey,” Peter James entered the arena.

## **PETER JAMES**



I had by then some knowledge of the business (I didn’t know it as a business before meeting Vic). I started on a path of trying to provide what people wanted. I worked on my own, in a duo, a trio, and a 4-piece band. I could do dinner dances, working men’s clubs, theatre’s, pubs, whatever was available. If the agent rang and said, “Can you?” my answer was always yes. I did get quite a name as a compere, having been employed by the local newspaper to compere their talent competitions, which led me to some theatre work as “host” in old-time music hall shows.

I was then asked to do what was one of my most interesting (and trying) weeks in the business. My agent had booked Lenny Henry to do a week of shows in Lincolnshire venues. This was the time that Lenny was popular for the TV show “Tiswas,” and the shows were sold out. A couple of weeks before the “week” was due to start, the agent was contacted to say that Lenny had to be in London that week as he was rehearsing a new TV show “Three of a Kind,” with Tracey Ullman and David Copperfield. He couldn’t



possibly do the week in the Midlands! I was booked to compere the show and ended up driving Lenny to the BBC in London each morning and getting back to Lincolnshire in time for the show each night. The plan was that Lenny could sleep during the car journey and I would be able to sleep on the sofa in the BBC rehearsal room. .... Yeah, fat chance (remember, it’s ok for you! You only work for about an hour a day!!). One of the hardest weeks of my life entertainment-wise but probably the best.

Life moved on, I met my wife Kim, we settled into family life, and I carved out a career in the DIY business.

In about 2005, Kim, Big Brother, and I (who have always been massive Shadows fans) went to see the “final tour” that the Shadows were doing. We looked at each other and thought, “Shall we?” We formed a family group: me on lead guitar, Big Brother on drums, his son Dave on rhythm guitar. We needed a bass player, so Kim in true Clarkson style said, “How hard can it be?” So, she learned (very quickly) to play. Our daughter Charlotte, who was studying music, joined in on keyboards. “Life Story,” our family band, played charity shows to help little theaters and other charities for the following 5 years or so until age took over (mine, not Kim’s!!), and we stopped performing.

Joining U3A a couple of years ago, we found the Sing 'n' Strum group, which, armed with guitar and bass, Kim and I joined. It is great to be able to carry on with music, which has been a very large part of my life, and to hopefully use some of life’s experience to bring some fun and purpose to not only the group members but to ourselves.

### BU3A Sing 'n' Strum

