

George Martin and Mark Featherstone-Witty on their father-son relationship and mutual appreciation for music education

GEORGE'S STORY

Sir George Martin, 87, The Beatles' record producer and patron of the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (Lead Patron: Sir Paul McCartney).

I'm not sure either of us can remember the exact date that we met, but it was in 1982 at Chrysalis Records in London. Our friendship had grown slowly but surely over the long years, together with a strong mutual love of music and a desire to develop musical education among the young people of today.

I was immediately drawn to Mark's idea for performing arts schools [first the BRIT School, then LIPA], mainly because, back then, there was nothing of its kind in the country. I wanted to try and get his ideas moving, but I was mindful of the difficulty of getting the funding for such a huge project. I remember an eminent recording chief who said to me 'What do we get out of it?'

We eventually convinced the music industry together that training was worthwhile and to back that financially. Not that everyone gave Mark the due credit. At The BRIT School launch at Abbey Road, [the former Education Secretary] Kenneth Baker decided that the picture op was to mimic the famous Beatles shot on the zebra crossing outside. As they were sorting out who would be taking part, no one mentioned Mark, without whom none of us would have been there. I said he had to be included. Initially, it was felt this would mean too many people in the photo, but I felt so strongly about this that I was prepared not to appear either. (Finally, and disappointingly grudgingly, they agreed – so long as he was at the back.)

Looking back, both our lives were very busy and a lot of the meetings between Mark and I were not as frequent as we would have liked. But today, 19 years since LIPA launched, the school is fulfilling its ambition. There is a lot of networking and collaboration between the students – after all, music is something better shared. This also applies to recording engineers, who must understand what it's like being a musician, and vice versa. A good example of this is The Wombats: the band's singer and their manager both came from LIPA.

I don't think people realise how important music education is. There should be more schools like it. The question is, how?

MARK'S STORY

Mark Featherstone-Witty, 67, LIPA co-founder and principal and creator of The BRIT School

When I decided, back in 1980, that I was going to start a 'fame school', I wrote letters to all the people I admired to ask them to comment on the curriculum and help raise the money for it. I wrote a letter to George, because I'd become interested in the

people who made performance possible, as well as the people who perform. At the time, I hadn't realised, but George was also one of the few people in the [pop] music industry who had had any training, at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. And he was one of the first people to reply to me.

He'll kill me for saying this, but he struck me as a bit like a school housemaster at first – polite, slightly distant, gracious and very like my own father. Likewise, our relationship was very much that of father and son. I hadn't come from a music background, I was a teacher and an entrepreneur, so he taught me everything about the music business; his points about music integration and interaction shaped LIPA's curriculum.

George was also the one who was instrumental in introducing me to Richard Branson [who founded the BRIT School with Mark] – and, of course, to Paul [McCartney, LIPA's co-founder]. He was quite the matchmaker and gave me the insider knowledge I needed to interact with Paul. After all, George had been completely open to The Beatles' wackiest ideas and had been completely prepared, with the most primitive equipment, to pull them off.

The BRIT launch incident was typical of George's fundamental decency and feel for fairness – I could always count on him to stand up for me. A few years later, at the launch for our next school, LIPA, he was also brilliant. He reminded everyone about the main creative and performing arts people who had helped to put Liverpool on the cultural map of the world and cried 'Do it again, Liverpool'.

Unfortunately, George is now stone-deaf, so we can't really share that much anymore. He has good and bad days. But he still comes to the LIPA graduations when he can with his wife Judy. We've named our main recording studio after him in tribute and are developing a relationship with his talented son, Giles.