

Review

Solid Silver 60s Show
Blackpool Grand Theatre

Old-timers let the good times roll

WISECRACKING Wayne Fontana is putting off-stage turbulence behind him to reinvent himself as a hit with music lovers of yesteryear. His third time in Blackpool on the endearing Solid Silver 60s Show again had us in stitches besides admiring the undiminished strength of his voice. Interspersed with Game Of Love, Um Um Um Um Um Um and Pamela Pamela etc were side-splitting pokes at himself which hid a dark side to his recent past.

As fellow OAP Frank Allen of The Searchers put it: "Wayne's been regaling us backstage about being banged up. Apparently he set fire to a bailiff's car - the trouble was the bailiff was inside!"

At 68, Fontana says he's done 12 of the 24 Silver tours and last night was every bit the show-stealer he was when here in 2001 and 2004.

Bill-toppers The Searchers can still do a great gig. Original member John McNally (67), 1964 recruit Allen and '85 arrival Spencer James blended powerfully in their 50 minutes' input into two hours 40 minutes.

The same goes for The Merseybeats, who were aided by Fontana having got the full house in the mood.

Like Allen, American legend John Walker is 65, though his voice lacks the authority and forcefulness it had when he played the Grand with Fontana five years ago.

Walker welcomed the support of his young wife Cynthia and The Dakotas backing group though he finished more like his old self with The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore.

Mike Young

Beat balladeer

He was never really called Walker, he never had the much rumoured huge bust-up with fellow band member Scott... and he still feels more British than American.

So says John Walker - real name John Maus - formerly one third of the chart topping Walker Brothers with Scott Engel and Gary Leeds - and still happy to be packing in the crowds as a soloist on the Solid Silver 60s tour which was at Blackpool Grand Theatre last night.

"We just always had an agreement that we'd stick together until one of us didn't like the idea any more," says John. "Scott wasn't fond of touring and Gary was easy going. I'd been performing live since I was 16 and like a leopard I couldn't change my spots. I wanted to work - and working meant touring. So the split became inevitable."

The three "brothers" went their own way in the late 1960s, briefly re-formed in the mid 1970s then broke up again in 1978.

"To a degree we still see each other," said John. "But I live in California so it's not easy. I see Gary because I'm involved in a book project with him. If I meet up with Scott it's always good. He sometimes pops up at one of my gigs but he keeps it secret - it's just what he's like so I honour that."

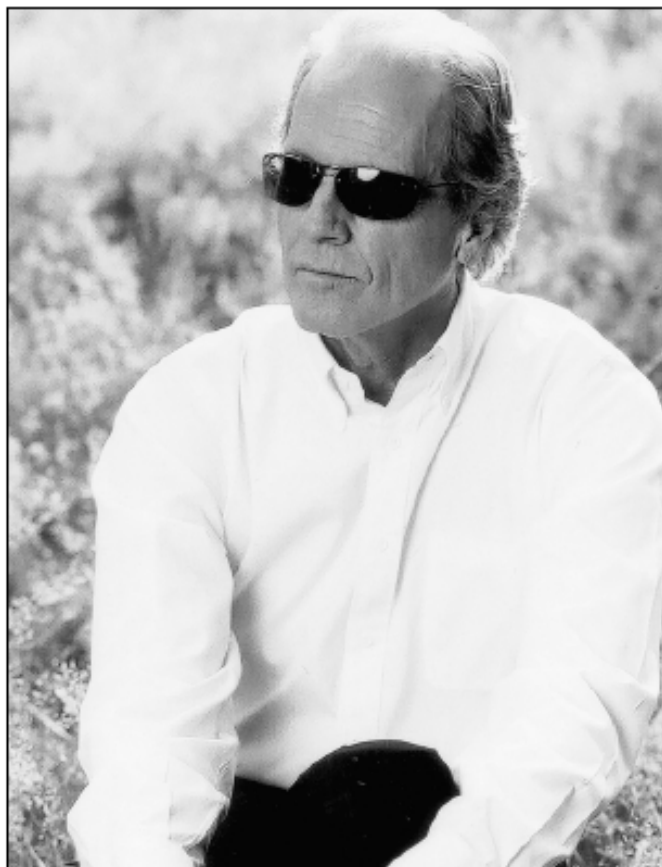
Apart from his regular visits and tours, John spends much of his time these days in his recording studio - but admits that life on the road is easier.

"I'm a perfectionist and it's a bit of a curse, but on tour everything is done for us and the guys behind the sound and lights are masters of their craft," he says.

"It's certainly different from the old days when you were never quite sure if everything would work or not - and then you couldn't hear yourself anyway because of the sound of the crowd. Now it's such a well oiled machine - and you know it's not going to suddenly explode behind you!"

He admits he sometimes wonders what would have happened if he, Scott and Gary hadn't taken a flight from California to London and landed in the middle of the 60s beat boom.

"We had quite a lot going on back home and I'm sure that would have continued to develop, but we touched down in the UK and it was like someone lit the touch paper and we took off," he says. "The strange thing was that we were here in the middle of the beat revolution and we were making big ballads."



OH BROTHER: John Walker is touring with the Solid Silver 60s Show

He's equally surprised that the Walker Brothers still have such a strong fan base.

"I never thought it would last beyond a few hit records," says John. "But it's one of the things that makes me feel extremely proud that we still have such an enormous reputation. And I still love the songs. I feel lucky to have been fortunate enough to have been given such great material. I never get tired of performing the hits."

At their height the Walker Brothers, with their American good looks and mop top hairstyles had a predominantly female following.

These days the split is a little more even. "More male fans who these days aren't ashamed to admit they do actually like the big romantic ballads - I certainly do, so there's nothing wrong with that!"

"I also like the fact that now I can get to talk to people after the show. It's really strange when they say they've waited 40 years to meet me - but it's great."

Despite his home in California John says he has always felt more British than American. "I came here in what were my formative years and I was pretty much based here until I was in my 40s so it's hardly surprising."