

Reviews - Angel with Drumsticks

Pamela King is a member of the Wollondilly FAW and is a most competent writer and mentor... she was also successful in having a story selected in last year's Seniors Short Stories publication.

I would like to mention a book Pamela has published called *Angel with Drumsticks*. Now, this is a very unusual but true story which you might say shook the foundations of the Vatican. For anyone interested in music, rock, and the Vatican it would be a most interesting read.

It was told to the author by Angelo Ferrari, drummer, singer and founder of the Italian Beat rock group *Angel and the Brains*. It's about how the band was formed and its music ambitions and tells the true story about the aftermath of La Messa Dei Giovani.

La Messa was conceived to fulfil the desires of Vatican II to make the Catholic Church more appealing to young people but, because of resulting bitter and vicious arguments within the Church and the Media, the Vatican took a course of action that was inconsiderate, hurtful and cold hearted.

There are a number of interesting black and white photographs in the book, of the band, of the Vatican, Rome, and the Pope.

This is a story I did not know and found it very compelling and very revealing.

The band's first record contract was with Ariel. To promote this new concept of a Rock Mass, priests travelled around Rome putting up posters at most of the Cathedrals and Churches and there were articles and photos in many newspapers.

Huge crowds turned up for this special rock mass, people of all ages, for and against.

Despite much complaint for and against, the band decided on a Rock Mass world tour.

The story relates how these young musicians who had responded to an invitation from the Church to perform the first rock Mass in Rome had their careers destroyed by the Vatican.

But I am leaving the guts of the story for readers ... it's a very unusual story that Pam has written.

Trevar Langlands, State President, Fellowship of Australian Writers

A scathing indictment of the Vatican and its handling of *La Messa Dei Giovani*, this emotive book chronicles a well-known story from a hitherto silent perspective; the founder of the band Angel and the Brains.

Jennifer Edmonds. Rating 5 out 5 stars

Fascinating account of a band that became a phenomenon in Italy and were poised for worldwide tour and promotion when it appears the Vatican (who had asked the young men to perform music for a mass in the first instance) suddenly caused every country to pull out of the tour due to internal debate and pressure around the use of "beat" music.

In the meantime careers and young lives were destroyed with repercussions echoing 50 years later. Although the book is not written "against" the church the reader can clearly see the great injustice done to all these young men who had only ever followed what they had been asked to do.

This book should be heavily promoted in Italy and for anyone who is interested in a memoir outlining a fascinating event and the devastating impact a church can have on individuals that the church has never apologised for or at the very least acknowledge the wrongfulness of their actions. An engaging read for music lovers also.

Jenny Hayworth. Rating 5 out 5 stars

A short interesting read that typifies the struggle of the 60s between youthful freedom and the establishment. In this case the mere mention of the parties involved, a pop (later rock) band and the Vatican, will arouse the reader's curiosity.

The many photographs interspersed within the text nicely depict the ambience of the 'beat' movement in Rome at that time and the main protagonist, the band Angel and the Brains. Those who remember this group should definitely read this chronicle of the injustices inflicted upon them by the Catholic Church.

Nathan Veerasamy. Rating 5 out 5 stars

Angel With Drumsticks tells the absorbing story of a group of talented young musicians in the 1960s who were squashed by the Vatican.

I admit that, before reading *Angel With Drumsticks* I had never heard of the 'Rock Mass', 'Beat Mass', or 'Mass for the Young' as it was variously called. I had never thought of Italian bands experimenting and working hard to develop an 'Italian beat', influenced by the Beatles, but certainly no carbon copy of them.

This was the dream of Angelo Ferrari and the teenage boys who joined him to write and practice songs and hope for performing breaks. They called themselves 'Angel and the Brains'. As Pamela King says in her preface, they were 'good Catholic boys who responded to an invitation from a church representative to fulfil the new desires of Vatican II to be more appealing to young people.'

The Mass, performed in a church, and including two groups besides Angelo's - the Bumpers and the Barrittas - was phenomenally successful in attracting a young audience; but the response of the Vatican hierarchy was as swift as it was unexpected. The band members were excommunicated (though the order was later rescinded). A proposed tour, including playing at the Albert Hall, was cancelled, all sponsors and venues pulling out simultaneously; the small company, Ariel, which had recorded the Mass went broke, and the three bands suddenly discovered that they could not even get gigs in small Italian towns. Those priests who had supported the Mass were moved to remote postings.

'Angel and the Brains' played in Tunisia for a while before breaking up, and Angelo's promising musical career was finished.

King has interviewed Angelo, who emigrated to Australia, and quotes his own thoughts and feelings, still vivid after nearly fifty years. *Angel With Drumsticks* contains some fascinating photographs and newspaper articles, providing insights into the furore over

the rock mass and the way the controversy has continued to re-surface over the years. It is a balanced account and at the same time a very personal one. The force and speed of the Vatican crackdown, when the bands believed the church had initiated the experiment in an endeavour to attract young people, remains a mystery. I highly recommend this book.

Dorothy Johnston. Rating 5 out 5 stars

Angel with Drumsticks is a history of the beginning of Beatles-era rock music in Italy. Without giving the story away, it recounts how a promising Italian Rock group developed the music originally at the request of the Catholic Church for a new style Catholic Mass that they hoped would encourage more young people to become involved in the Church. As in many situations, subsequent events did not turn out as expected, for the church or the musicians, and the influence of Italian rock music, compared to the British rock groups for example, was minimized. The story is well researched and written, and students of the history of rock music should find this an interesting and informative narrative.

Lee Davis. Rating 5 out 5 stars

Un atto d'accusa feroce al Vaticano e il trattamento fatto alla Messa Dei Giovani, questo libro emotivo racconta un nota storia da un punto di vista fino a questo momento tenuto nascosto; il fondatore del complesso Angel and the Brains.

Jennifer Edmonds. Rating 5 out 5 stars