

Excerpt

Angel with Drumsticks:

The rock that shook the foundations of the Vatican by Pamela King

1. Not just any rock concert

The young men fidgeted behind stage, waiting for the seats to fill and their signal to begin. This was to be the biggest concert yet in their fledgling music careers, and each one was filled with that curious mixture of excitement flavoured with nervousness that comes from such an event. They had practised until they were flawless—their fingers knew every chord change, their voices every harmony, they had been living and sleeping and dreaming this moment for weeks and they were as ready as they could ever be—yet still the hearts fluttered lightly and breath was occasionally short; they knew that this was an important milestone.

Three bands, all comprising young men, would share the stage, and each take their turn at the songs they had been allotted until the last number, which they would perform together. They had never worked together before—this was the first time they had ever met—and they wondered how their very different and distinctive styles would play out together on stage.

As they waited, they could hear the concert hall filling.

Just over two hours earlier, when their car had pulled up outside the forbidding building designed by 17th Century architect Borromini, the young band members stared at the intimidating building and took a collective deep breath. Angelo dropped his cheek into the palm of his hand. “Well, we are here, I hope everything goes alright”.

It had been a typical Roman spring day. *Aprile dolce dormire* is an Italian expression meaning ‘April sweet sleep’. In Rome it is a beautiful mid-spring month, the days are usually fresh, mostly sunny or partly cloudy. It is known as a month for quiet relaxation and great for day trips or short holidays.

Now, as the bands launched into their music—delighting their audience with their new beat, their new style, their new *way*—the gentle spring air was shattered, the music was so loud it could be heard kilometres away. Even the thunderous Italian traffic with its constant discordant harmony of horns could not be heard in the forecourt of the Oratorium let alone inside the hall itself.

The 2,000-seat auditorium had no pre-booked seating and it was a matter of first in, first served. The organisers had been hopeful of a healthy turnout, but even their most optimistic assessments were shattered when over 10,000 turned up, and around 8,000 were turned away from the doors of the already full hall. Speakers were hastily erected outside for the benefit of these eager young fans, who jostled and crowded on the outside, desperate to hear the sounds of their favourite band.

The national Italian television station, RAI, set up their television cameras to record the occasion and police lines were unable to contain the horde of youngsters who, motivated by this new and vital mystical feeling, had swamped the seats, tables and cornices to insure those few centimetres of space needed to wiggle their limbs.

The boom of the drums and bass sounded like a thunder storm about to hit—and it was.

The 8,000 fans, mostly young people, who couldn’t get into the venue, were intoxicated by the sounds coming from the huge speakers that had been hastily set up so everyone could still hear the music being performed inside.

Inside, the applause was nearly as loud as the music and young girls were screaming with tears running down their faces as they jostled to get a closer glimpse of their new music heroes and, if at all possible, touch them.

As the words and the music drew the crowd in, eager for more, the musicians were both astounded and elated by the adulation and excitement of the crowd.

The young musicians of Angel and the Brains had practiced industriously, perfecting their talent and style. They had already enjoyed some success with their new Italian beat but this was a phenomenal response to their new style. "At last our music is being received well," the young Angelo Ferrari thought to himself as they handed over to the next band on the stage, and wished with all his heart that his band were performing more than their allotted four songs.

At 6pm the temperature was still a warm 20 degrees. Inside the Oratorium, the crowd of 2,000 people, RAI's lighting and the stage lighting added to the intensity of the heat. Inside it was hot, airless and smoke filled, but the audience in their frenzy didn't seem to notice.

Members of Angel and the Brains had hoped that this concert would go well, and launch their music careers, and it seemed that their hopes and dreams were to be realised this night. They could have no way of knowing that this concert that would see them rocket to the dizzy heights of fame, would also be the cause of their ultimate failure.

What the bands and the fans didn't know back then in 1966 was that a religious furore would follow this performance, for this was no ordinary rock concert; it was the world's first rock Mass and the venue for this extraordinary concert was not an ordinary concert hall or outdoor stadium but in fact a Catholic Church—the St. Filippo Neri Oratorium, Sala Borromini in Piazza della Chiesa Nuova 18, Rome.

It would be the first—and last—time that rock music would be heard from within the hallowed walls of a Catholic Church in Rome.

2. How did I get here

On stage at the Mass, while waiting to perform his next song, Angelo pondered his journey to this point. It had been such a brief time since he had decided in 1962 at the age of 14 he wanted to play music and make it his career.

It had begun some years earlier when his mother had interrupted his television watching to announce, "I have arranged for a piano teacher to come once a week so you can learn to play."

The ten year old had groaned, "Why?"

"Because everyone needs to learn some cultural skill", she replied. "Don't groan like that, your sister will also be learning ballet".

That made Angelo grin as he chuckled to himself, "That will be a big joke!"

Although he complained at first about the lessons, Angelo quickly took to music and when he got bored with repetitive practising of piano scales, he would experiment with different chords and sing along to his own music, writing down songs as he created them.

Angelo's mother had been a soprano and her father a tenor. She recognised the boy's talent and passion and once again decided it was time for lessons. She said to him, "Well, if you like to sing you better learn how."

His father spoke to a well-known singing teacher, hoping he would train his son in voice. "I don't just take anyone," the teacher warned. "You had better bring him along so I can hear him,"

Angelo was very nervous but the teacher quickly put him at ease asking gently, "What would you like to sing?"

"*Un Angelo non sei*," replied Angelo, with nerves fluttering in his stomach. "Do you know it? It is a Little Tony song."

"Yes, I know it," smiled the maestro.

Angelo sang while the teacher accompanied him on the piano. When he finished, the teacher turned enthusiastically to Angelo's father and announced, "I'll take him, he has a voice!"

In addition to his piano lessons Angelo now started singing lessons once a week.

He was often left alone at home but was never lonely when he had music to play. He enjoyed it and it was an escape for him trying new passes and chords. He often wrote songs down just for his own enjoyment.

As he watched television or listened to the radio he thought to himself, "I can do better than that!" The quiet music rebel inside had started to emerge, showing signs of what was to come.

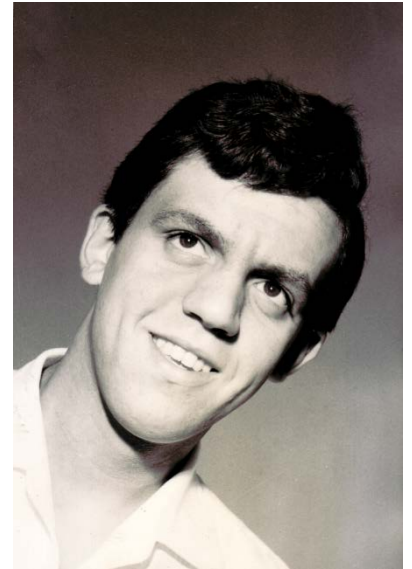
After taking formal singing lessons for a year and a half and learning keyboard he also tried the bass guitar but decided it was not for him.

Between the ages of 14 and 16 he performed as a solo singer in theatres and as a support artist to bigger name performers in concerts in small towns.

Angelo remembered the first time he was booked to sing by himself.

"I was so nervous. I remember so clearly the variety theatre where I performed for a week alongside other performers including comedians, a juggler, magician and dancers.

"It was at the Teatro Ambra Jovinelli. I was fascinated by the design of the building. It was the only one in Rome built in the Art Nouveau style and intended as a comedy theatre."



Angelo at 15 years old



Teatro Ambra Jovinelli

In 1962 some cinemas had a live show before the movie started so at that time it was actually a theatre and cinema in one.

"I performed three songs every evening and twice on Sunday. All I can remember about the dancers is that their legs were as long as I was tall!"

He recalled the kindly comedian who was in charge and remembered him telling the stage manager, "Don't put the young singer on after me. The last thing this kid needs is people

laughing when he comes on stage."

Angelo says, "I ended up performing between the juggler and the magician.

"I was paid good money that week. It was equivalent to a month's pay for an average worker at the time.

"The other performers were part of a variety troupe that travelled around Italy performing at various venues. At the end of the week they invited me to join them but I still had school and a lot more to learn about music."

About a month later his maestro, who had got him the job in the theatre, suggested he enter a festival song competition in the small southern Roman town of Rocca di Papa. "I competed against 25 other singers who performed a variety of songs and I won the festival.

"I then went to stay for a while with some priests in Rieti, a city north of Rome. The priest who baptised me knew I was singing and had invited me to visit.

"We had a party there and every night enjoyed a beautiful dinner. One special moment was when I met the mayor of the town who asked me to perform at a big festival they were holding.

"In autumn, my maestro got me another contract. This time I was performing all night, every night for a month in a night club. I was the youngest performer there but everyone was very nice to me. I went on stage five or six times every night singing for about half an hour each time I was on stage."

He chuckled, "Oh, I remember how hard it was to drag myself out of bed to go to school each day because I was performing from nine p.m. until three in the morning!

"At that time there was very little rock and roll in Italy so I was still performing the old traditional Italian songs."

Maybe it was the combination of the quality of his voice for his age that made him appeal to the traditional audiences, but he was not happy and he considered the music boring and of little challenge.

The music he enjoyed listening to the most was by some of the new Italian artists of the time who he considered young, innovative and interesting. These artists included Adriano Celentano, Little Tony and Bobby Solo.

He smiled to himself as he recalled watching the first of the rock-and-roll performers in Italy in the 50s, Adriano Celentano, perform on stage. Celentano jumped up and down all the time and people started calling him 'The Spring' and he was great fun to watch. However, Angelo felt that Little Tony and Bobby Solo's songs were more his style and focused on their music. He said, "Little Tony was more gentle in his rock technique than The Spring. Bobby Solo styled himself like Elvis Presley with a similar hairstyle and moves, but I always thought his voice was much better than Elvis's and in my opinion his songs were a lot nicer, too."

Angelo did concentrate more on songs from Little Tony and Bobby Solo and their style did seem to suit him. He even did cover versions of the two artists in his performances.

When not at school, singing lessons or performing, Angelo continued to sit at his piano and write his own songs. He tried recording one of his songs but as he was still only 15 he did not have any success. But he didn't let it stop him continuing to compose.

After discovering the new style of music being sung in Italy, he finally had songs he liked and could be included in his repertoire but he still wasn't completely happy. No matter who was singing, young or old, they were being backed by musicians from the 1940s. "That's when I decided I needed my own group. I needed to be able to give them the music and make sure it was the right music for the day."

Talking to one of his friends about the music of the time Angelo said, "If anyone really listens to music from the 1940s and 1950s—not just Italian music, but from all over the world—they would realise that there were a lot of instruments being used. This was fine in the 40s and a good part of the 50s because it meant there was a full orchestra backing the singer and 25 to 30 musicians playing a wide range of instruments.

"But look what has happened. The bands got smaller and smaller in the latter part of the 1950s until there were only four or five people playing instruments. Something else is needed to fill the sound because a guitar, keyboard or organ by itself cannot fill up the whole music or the whole song."

As a solo artist, Angelo had to rely on backing musicians who were, without exception, used to playing 1940s-style music and unable to produce the energy in their music that he craved.

After coming off stage one day, having been backed by one of these bands, he told his father, "There are gaps everywhere in the music and there is no beat! I can't perform my songs the way I think they should be. I need a band with beat and enthusiasm behind me. I need somebody I can practice with and in the end I can trust when we are performing."

"That's fine, but how do we start to do that?" his father asked.

"First find somewhere to practice, then spread the word that we are looking for musicians to join a band," Angelo replied.

"I think I know someone that can help with a room to practice," his father mused, giving it some thought.

"That's great!" said Angelo. "I'll tell some friends that we are looking for good musicians, but I don't want anyone over 20 years old".

"It will be not easy to get good musicians so young," cautioned his father.

"Let me worry about that. I'm sure I can get them and they will play my way," laughed Angelo.

3. Band formation

Angelo had decided two years earlier that music would be his career and as he was just finishing school in 1964 he decided the time was right to form his band. He was living at home and had the support and encouragement of his parents.

He went to his friends and told them about his idea. "I want to get a band together. Do you know anyone who might be interested?"

"I know someone who is really good on the guitar but doesn't like to practice on his own so he might be interested," said Umberto thoughtfully.

"Wow that's exciting. I too know someone who plays guitar and would be really good in a band," said Giorgio

The first musician they found was Ruggero Coletta, a guitar player the same age as Angelo. He was a very good guitarist and had his own ideas about music as well as being good at arrangements. He was the ideal musician for the new band.

Angelo asked him, "Are you ready to create a new style of music?"

"Yes, I have been looking for an opportunity like this. I've had enough of listening to the same style of music all the time and I've come to dislike conservatory-trained musicians", he replied eagerly.

They decided to get together once a day to try to find more musicians for the band.

The second band member was Maurizio Vitti. He wasn't as skilled with the guitar as Ruggero but he already had a beat sound in his playing style.

"What do you think is your best attribute as a musician?" Angelo asked him.

"I am good at following the band leader, providing the leader will follow my beat." He smiled.

Angelo looked at him. He was enthusiastic and a good musician but even to Angelo he looked very young. "Just how old are you?" Angelo asked him.

"I'm fourteen, almost fifteen," bragged the young guitarist.

"Are you still at school?" Ruggero asked him.

"I just finished junior high," Maurizio told him. He turned to Angelo. "Look, if you are worried about my commitment, just give me a try. I will prove to you I am committed."

Still a bit doubtful, Angelo smiled at him. "When we find some more members we'll give you a try and see what happens."

"I know a keyboard player that may be interested," Maurizio said, keen to be part of the group and get started.

"Good," said Ruggero, "tell him to come along too."

Angelo and the other kids met and discussed music at length. They all felt the music of the day was dreary the way it was being performed most of the time and agreed to form the band that was to become Angel and the Brains.

At the end of 1964, with the blessing and the support of all their parents, they started to look for somewhere to practice.

"If we are going to play the type of music we like we need somewhere to practice where people won't complain about the noise," one of the boys said gloomily.

"My father has been working on this." Angelo told the boys. "You know the amusement arcade in Via Manlio Torquato? I know the owner from soccer and he has a basement that is not used. We are going to see him this afternoon."

The amusement arcade had been one of Angelo's favourite places as a young boy where he enjoyed playing on the game machines. He remembered the friendly owner, Vincenzo, who had also been president of the local soccer club and encouraged him to play for the team. Although he enjoyed soccer very much, unfortunately, during the second game he played Angelo was injured. By the time he was fit enough to play again the demands of music and school were too much.

Angelo and his father visited him to ask if the boys could practice in the basement of the arcade. Vincenzo was only too happy to support the dedicated young band and happily allowed them to use it for free.

Angelo took the other band members to have a look at their new rehearsal place. The friendly owner greeted them warmly.

At this point there were only three in the band, two guitars and Angelo as the singer. The boys started to practice while they continued to look for a drummer, keyboard player and a bass guitar.

"What are you going to call yourselves?" asked Vincenzo. The boys looked at each other and back to Vincenzo, "We hadn't even thought about it!"

"Well I can't tell people about the great band in my basement if they don't have a name!"

"Let us think about it and we'll get back to you" said Ruggero. Angelo told the others that it would be up to them to choose the name.

The boys tossed around names but nothing really appealed. To stop the debate Angelo said, "Well, I am angel, what are you?"

Again the boys couldn't come up with an answer. "You are a bright lot aren't you?" Angelo jokingly he added. "A bunch of real brains!"

The others stopped arguing and look at Angelo, then Maurizio, clicking his fingers, said, "That's good! Why not call us The Brains". They all agreed and went upstairs to Vincenzo's office. In almost perfect unison they announced. "The band you have in your basement is Angel and the Brains!"

A few days later when the boys were gathering together to practice, Maurizio brought in a short chunky boy and introduced him as Alberto, the keyboard player he had told them about.

Ruggero asked, "Alberto, what type of music do you like and what do you play?"

Alberto looked down at his feet, embarrassed to tell these boys about his music training. “Well,” he answered tentatively, “I study classical music. But,” he added quickly, perhaps sensing their reactions, “I was tired of that and got myself an organ and I’ve started to play modern songs on that. I love that English band, the Beatles, and I play their music all the time.”

“All of us know The Beatles and love their music. It is close to what we want to perform but with a different beat. Their music is British Beat, we want to create an Italian Beat but we still need a drummer and a bass player,” Angelo explained.

Alberto was accepted as the new keyboard player and the next day he arrived at the basement with his organ.

The original Angel and the Brains band members were Angelo Ferrari (vocals), Ruggero Coletta (guitar), Alberto Del Duca (keyboard) and Maurizio Vitti (guitar). All the boys originated from Appio-Tuscolano, Rome, and all felt the same about traditional Italian music—that it was uninspiring for young people.

At that time Angelo’s father was a Customs Inspector at Fiumicino Airport – Leonardo Davinci (Rome International).

As he was passing through the airport reception one day he heard a voice calling, “Mr Ferrari, Mr Ferrari!” He turned to see one of the cleaners running towards him.

As she caught up to him she said breathlessly, “I heard that your son has a band and they are looking for a drummer”.

“Yes, that is right,” he replied. “Why? Do you know someone who might be interested?”

“Yes, my son Lino plays drums and is not too bad,” she replied with a proud smile.

Angelo’s father gave her the address of the basement and told her, “Tell Lino to be there any day around 10 in the morning. They are there every day at that time to start practising.”

“You can tell your son to expect him,” she replied.

Lino strolled in a week later ready to set up his drums. The boys looked at him, confused. Without even meeting them, he had brought his kit, as though his acceptance in the band was a given.

He must have realised the other boys were a bit taken aback and quickly said, “Hi, I’m Lino, I think I was expected. Angelo’s father told me to come down. I brought my drums with me so you can hear my playing and tell me if I am good enough or not.”

“You’re right, sorry if we looked confused,” said Ruggero.

“OK then, let’s play something,” grunted Alberto.



Well at least for the moment they had a drummer.

Angel and the Brains from left Ruggero, Alberto, Angelo, Enrico, Lino and Maurizio

Vincenzo, the arcade owner, was very supportive and knew they were looking for other musicians to join the band. People would say, “Oh you’ve got a band down there? They’ve got a great sound, wish I could play with them.”

“Yes, they are looking for other musicians, why don’t you talk to them?” he would encourage.

That’s how they found their bass player, Enrico.

As they walked through the arcade on their way to practice one morning, they noticed the tall young man with short black hair playing on one of the machines and watching them as they went downstairs into the basement.

"Hi, my name is Enrico, the owner of the arcade told me you are looking for a bass player. I play the bass and I was looking for a band to join. Would you give me a try?"

"Sure," Angelo replied, "but do you have your own bass guitar and amplifier?"

"I have them at home." The young man replied eagerly. "I don't live far from here. If you can give me half an hour I'll be back."

At 20, Enrico was a little older than the other boys but he fitted in well with the group and their music.

The word had spread through family and friends, and finally they had a drummer and bass player and the band was complete.

For several months the boys practised every day in the basement of the arcade, except for a month over the Christmas/New Year holidays. They performed songs of other artists but re-arranged them to suit their own style and were finally successful in getting bookings for six or seven shows in small towns. Although at this time they were only drawing small audiences, the boys and their new sound were well received.

Their repertoire included the most popular Italian songs of the time and some songs by the Shadows and The Beatles to give a wide variety.

Angelo told me, "All the songs were re-arranged to demonstrate what we were trying to achieve; create what we called an Italian beat. They had more rhythm and more sparkle to them and ultimately we had our own style. The drums were more prominent and bass guitar took away the symphonic sound that was in original arrangements. Put simply, there was more beat and no orchestra-like sound. The organ was only a backing not the main instrument as in the past."

In the summer of 1965 Angelo's aunt and uncle from Canada visited Italy for a holiday. His cousin, Grace, would go to the basement to listen to the boys practice.

"You know, Ange, with your voice you would do really well in Canada and even the States. You've got the sort of voice they listen to there," she commented one day.

The basement had served very well as a place to practice. Vincenzo was very careful to make sure the boys were left alone to practice and that their instruments were safe from damage and theft.

If someone tried to open the door to the basement while the boys were practising he would stop them with a firm, "No you are not allowed down there."

At night, when he was closing up, he would make sure the door was locked before he left. It was not unlocked again until the boys picked up the key the next day.

While the boys were happy with the arrangement they had with Vincenzo they found the basement a bit dark and dingy. It was very limited in space when the six of them had to fit in with all the instruments. They were also very conscious that the music might be a bit loud for the people upstairs.

They mentioned this to Vincenzo who protested, "You can stay as long as you like!" But then shook his head and said sadly, "But you really do need a bigger place."

In need of a suitable new place to practice, Angelo's father and the boys approached the monsignor of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice, in the Tuscolano district of Rome, and again not far from where the boys lived. They told him about the band and asked if the boys could use one of the big rooms at the side of the cathedral. "You would be very welcome boys," the monsignor told them.

Santa Maria Ausiliatrice

“We can’t afford to pay for the hire,” warned one member of the group, mournfully.

“That’s alright,” said the monsignor, “we have an empty room on the side of the Oratorium, it is not used very much and you can practise there for nothing.”

They moved all their gear to the Oratorium in October 1965.

Just before the move, the bass player, Enrico, was called up for military service. They needed to replace him quickly and decided to hold an audition. Being the only band in the area, it was a rare opportunity for ambitious, young, local musicians and six or seven hopefuls came along. A couple of them were not very good and Angelo told them they needed more practice. However, there were a couple of very good players among them and it took some time for the boys to agree that Maurizio Aloisi should be the one to join them.

With their spacious new premises, all six band members could fit easily.

“Now we have room to breathe and light to see what we doing,” smiled Lino.

“Hey guys, look over there! Is that a soccer table?” called Maurizio, prowling around the room and poking in its corners. The boys went closer to investigate and soon four of them were engrossed in a game, but it didn’t take long before an indignant voice dragged them back to reality.

“Hoi! Are we here to practice or what?” shouted Lino.

“Come on, he’s right,” Ruggero urged.

Practice was every afternoon six days a week. That was the arrangement with the Monsignor because in the school next to the rehearsal room was full of students each morning until one p.m.

“It was probably six months from when we started the group to when we got our first gig,” Angelo laughed, describing one concert in a nursing home for elderly people and how the band had had to adjust their music and put some of the old popular Italian songs in the repertoire. Staying true to their music though, they performed the songs in their own style.

“People were jumping up and down. Some of them in wheelchairs and some with walking sticks also tried to dance. It was great fun.”

Angelo recalled other gigs were at prestigious restaurants in the small towns of Rocca Priora and Marino and a New Year’s Eve concert on 31st December 1965 in another big restaurant.

Rock and roll had swept the United States and England like a tidal wave but for Italian teenagers, American music, especially the surfing sounds, were neither popular nor relevant. The Italian teenagers were more interested in English bands like The Beatles and the Mersey Beat sound.

The Beatles were part of the British Beat movement that had taken over the music scene in England and even invaded America from 1964. It provided the model for many important developments in pop and rock music.

It was known as Mersey Beat or Mersey Sound because of the hundreds of bands performing at dance halls in and around Merseyside, (the area around the Mersey River in Liverpool) the most famous being The Cavern Club where The Beatles were discovered.

Angelo explained, “As kids we picked up on the Beatles and from there figured out how it could be done—an Italian beat—and that’s partly how the Mass became instrumental in the popularity of the Italian beat. You will read many sources crediting the Barrassos with the Italian Beat. The



Barrittas had nothing to do with the beat even for the Mass. The only beat there was the Bumpers and us—that's it!"

He went on to say, "The Beatles came out with songs that were very different in sound to the American rock and roll bands. Their new sound was not rock and roll and they never wrote rock and roll songs, they had their own unique music. While the Rolling Stones were closer to the American style they were not as popular as The Beatles in Italy."

Admiring The Beatles and their new sound, Angel and the Brains were finally able to refine their style. It was from there the Italian beat started, which also became known as the 'putting beat' of Italy.

It was late January 1966, just over three months after moving their rehearsals to the cathedral Oratorium, that their future music career finally started to have a very positive direction.

"We didn't attend church on a regular basis but we had grown up with the Church being part of our lives and were all fairly good Catholics. We were just not into the religious side of things. The priests at the cathedral would scold us because we were practising there and never went to church. This is why we were so surprised when maestro Giombini and some priests visited us one day.

"In the early part of 1966 we weren't angry with the church, we knew what the Catholic Church was all about because we grew up in Rome, but didn't really care."

4. Angel and the Brains meet Giombini

Pope John XXIII

Pope John XXIII was born Angelo Roncalli. In 1953 he was created a cardinal and sent to Venice as Patriarch.

When Angelo was a little boy his family lived in Venice and his father knew Cardinal Roncalli well from when they travelled on the ferry together for years; Angelo's father going to work and the cardinal going to the cathedral each morning. During their morning chats he made it clear to Angelo's father that he thought the church needed shaking up.



A Venetian ferry of the 1950s



Pope John XXIII

Angelo met him on several occasions and found him to be very intelligent and very progressive in his thinking and related some wonderful stories about him to me; stories both endearing and amusing. Throughout his church life he worked with his people and understood their needs.

Pope John XXIII had long experience and understood people's needs. He believed in plain speech and used everyday language and believed that the Catholic Church should be 'opening windows' and 'not museum-keepers but gardeners to help things grow'.

Pope John believed that modern society was witnessing a crisis as the world made great material progresses that were not always in keeping with Christian morals. He saw a world pursuing earthly pleasure and ignoring spiritual values.

He felt he had an urgent duty to call church leaders together to discuss the problems of the modern age and how the church could contribute to the solutions.

On 25th January 1959, less than three months after his election, Pope John gave notice of his intention to convene an Ecumenical Council.

This was the twenty-first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, a conference of church dignitaries and religious experts brought together to discuss the doctrines and practices of the church.

The previous council, known as the First Vatican Council, had been held in 1868, so this one was called the Second Vatican Council and known informally as Vatican II.

He saw Vatican II as demonstrating that the Church was 'always living and always young, which feels the rhythm of the times and which in every century beautifies herself with new splendour, radiates new light, achieves new conquests'.

Vatican II was convened on 11th October 1962. One of the changes that Pope John XXIII wanted was to make the Church more relevant to the young people, to modernise the Church and be more welcoming to entice them to follow its spiritual path, rather than exhort them to do so.

Pope John XXIII died in June 1963, before he had been able to lead the Church through the reforms of Vatican II. Had his still been the hand on the tiller of the Catholic Church, things might have been very different today.

Giombini

While the boys were getting their band together and perfecting their new sound, Marcello Giombini was making a name for himself writing movie soundtracks.

The young Giombini had been a church organist in Rome and pursued a music career. He became choir director for the Accademia Filarmonica Romana and was orchestra director for Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma until the 1950s.

His love of music led him to writing symphonies and conducting Renaissance music. The future would see Giombini's music compared to the great musicians and performers of the past, from Bach to Mozart, Verdi to Perosi.

By the 1960s his long career writing successful movie soundtracks had already started, but it was to be his religious music that would bring worldwide notoriety.

Giombini was a luminary of contemporary music. He had written his first religious music, *Thou shalt not kill*, which was released by the Barrantas on 45 rpm record in 1965, with some success. However, Giombini went on to make a name among young Catholics in 1966 writing *La Messa dei Giovani* (*Mass for the Young*) which became known simply as *La Messa* or the *Beat Mass*. It was to become famous for its innovative liturgical music and for the resulting popularity of the Italian beat sound.

Sinaldi

One of the outcomes of Vatican II was a desire to make the church more appealing to young people. Monsignor Sinaldo Sinaldi, a Dominican priest whose order specialised working with young people, conceived the idea of holding a special mass based on modern music.

He was close to the world of cinemas, well-known movie critic, an influential member of the Catholic Centre Cinema and knew Giombini by reputation and as a composer of soundtracks.

He told Giombini about his idea to encourage young people to return to the church. It was certainly a daring initiative but Father Sinaldi's idea was not necessarily implausible.

Vatican II had stressed the need to 'admit to divine worship all forms of true art having the needed qualities'. Thousands of young people were attracted to popular music but were drifting away from the church.

Father Sinaldi thought that if 'beat' music could reach young people, then why not put it in a service of the Church?

Giombini was very enthusiastic about the concept and composed *La Messa* for voices, guitars, bass, keyboards and percussion. As the purpose of the Mass was to appeal to the young, it was deliberately composed to suit the new beat music.

He collaborated with Giuseppe Scoponi, Professor Tommaso Federici and Charles Gasbarri who wrote the words and finalised the work.

The Mass comprised nine songs: Introit, Gloria, *Gradual*, *Creed*, Offertory, Sanctus, *Pater Noster*, *Agnus Dei* and Communion.

The planned church service was not meant to be just a novelty event but a turning point, intended to make a mark in the profound liturgical music reform desired by the Vatican II.

Monsignor Sinaldi worked with Marcello Giombini on the presentation of the Mass. They already had two bands lined up to perform the work.

While telling the priests of Santa Maria Ausiliatrice about the plans for the Mass, Sinaldi mentioned that they still needed one more band that would be suitable. He was told about the young group of boys just starting out and using one of the rooms for practice. The priests believed they had enormous potential and would be ideal as the third band Sinaldi and Giombini were seeking.

Angel and the Brains Meet Giombini and Sinaldi

In late January 1966 Sinaldi and Giombini went to the Santa Maria Ausiliatrice. They quietly entered the grounds from Via Don Rua and silently hid outside the door of the room where Angel and the Brains were practising. The boys didn't see or hear them as they secretly listened to the band rehearsing.

It wasn't until the next day that Sinaldi and Giombini returned and introduced themselves, although it wasn't until later that the boys found out about their secret eavesdropping to determine if this band had that special something that the organisers were looking for.

"We have a proposition. We are organising a rock Mass and need another band to perform part of it. Are you interested in coming and performing for the Mass?" Giombini asked bluntly.

The boys stood in amazement as Giombini explained, "It will be held at the St. Filippo Neri Oratorium, Sala Borromini and there will be three groups there. We'd like you to be one of them." Two other bands, The Barrittas and The Bumpers, had already been signed.

Sinaldi outlined what he was hoping to achieve with the Mass. He explained that because it was an experiment, immediately after the performance he would lead a discussion on the success of the concept with those in attendance.

Expecting it to be a great success he also explained that before the Mass, the bands would be recording the songs for an album to be released the same day.

"Can you give us ten minutes to discuss it among ourselves please?" Angelo asked. Sinaldi and Giombini agreed to give the boys some time to discuss it.

"Take as long as you want. We'll wait outside. Just call us when you have made a decision," Giombini smiled knowing it probably wouldn't take the boys long.

As soon as their visitors departed, the boys started talking enthusiastically.

"I think we should take it," said Ruggero.

"Why?" asked Lino.

"Because it will give us the opportunity to be recognised as a professional band with a record out there," replied Ruggero.

"Yes but it would be religious music, we are trying to get our new beat sound out there," argued Maurizio.

"Religious music or not, we should take it, even just to get the recording studio contract. Then we'll see after the Mass what comes up," said Angelo.

Having personally known Pope John XXIII, his personal ambition to progress the Church and understanding the aims of Vatican II, Angelo was probably more enthusiastic than the other band members to participate in the Mass.

It was a great opportunity for the young band and all of them soon saw the advantages to them. As Giombini had foreseen, their discussion didn't last long; they all agreed very quickly.

Ruggero invited Giombini and Sinaldi to come back inside.

"OK." Angelo told them. "We all agree. We will be very happy to do the Mass. How do we go about it?"

Giombini returned a week later with the sheet music and a recording of the music played by him on piano.

"Listen to the music I have played, but please put your own arrangement to it and we'll see what it is like," he told them. "I want each band to play in their own style and put their own personality to it."

After Giombini had left Angelo turned to the other boys excitedly, "Well, we don't know what the songs are like, but at least we can play them our own way!"

They listened to the tape Giombini had left, one song at the time, discussing each one as they went.

"OK this was the *Introito*," said Ruggero. "It is very slow we need to sparkle it up more."

"Yes it need little bit of beat in it," Maurizio agreed.

At the end of the second song Angelo said happily, "This is better, it has something we can really work with. It is faster and will be easy to put a good beat in it." They all concurred.

Finally they listened to the third song. It was good and very melodic but would be very difficult to add the beat to it. They decided to leave practising this song last.

The last song Giombini wanted the boys to learn and perform was not one they had to record.

The band practised even harder and more passionately than they had before, understanding that this was a great opportunity to make a big name for themselves, and that fame and acceptance was possibly within reach.

Every day brought new arguments born out of the desire to perfect their sound—arguments about a certain pass, the rhythm and even the notes—but they were united in the sound they wanted to achieve, and always managed to agree in the end.

Giombini called in to visit at least once a week to monitor progress, and liked what he heard. Only once or twice did he suggest a different way of doing something.

The boys worked hard and although they were ready within six weeks, they kept practising every day right up to the day before the performance.