

Jill Embury - Pirate DJ

WHEN THE HIT BRITISH FILM *THE BOAT THAT ROCKED* WAS RELEASED IN 2009, THERE WAS RENEWED INTEREST IN THE "PIRATE" RADIO STATIONS OF THE 60'S SUCH AS RADIO LUXEMBOURG AND CAROLINE. ONE OF THE DJ'S OF THE WAVES WAS JILL EMBURY FROM BALSALL HEATH. THE STATION, RADIO 390, DIDN'T OPERATE FROM A BOAT BUT FROM THE FORMER BRITISH ARMY MAUNSELL TOWERS, KNOWN AT THE FORT, LOCATED ON THE RED SANDS SANDBAR IN THE THAMES ESTUARY. SADLY JILL, ONLY MADE THREE PROGRAMMES BEFORE THE STATION WAS FORCED OFF THE AIR BY THE GOVERNMENT IN 1967.



"MY RADIO CAREER LASTED ONLY THREE WEEKS," REMEMBERS JILL, WHO USED THE STAGE NAME SAMANTHA LEIGH. "I DIDN'T EVEN ACTUALLY BROADCAST FROM THE FORT — I RECORDED THE PROGRAMMES AT THE STATION'S OFFICES IN LONDON. IT SUITED ME BECAUSE I WAS IN LONDON ANYWAY TO MAKE RECORDS". JILL WAS MAKING A NAME FOR HERSELF AS A CABARET SINGER WHEN SHE WAS SIGNED UP BY RADIO 390 SUPREMO TED ALLBEURY IN THE MID-1960'S. "HE WANTED A FEMALE SINGER FOR A 'SWEET MUSIC' PROGRAMME CALLED DINNER AT EIGHT," SAYS JILL. "APPARENTLY HE'D HEARD ME SING AND ASKED IF I'D BE INTERESTED IN BEING THE STATION'S FIRST FEMALE DISC JOCKEY IT WAS AN HOUR-LONG PROGRAMME OF MIDDLE OF THE ROAD, EASY LISTENING MUSIC. THE ONLY THING I WAS WORRIED ABOUT WAS MY SLIGHTLY MIDLAND ACCENT. BUT I WAS TOLD NOT TO ALTER IT BECAUSE THEY LIKED IT. I THINK AT THAT TIME RADIO WAS TRYING TO ATTRACT PEOPLE WITH

REGIONAL ACCENTS." JILL SAYS HER PROGRAMME WAS POPULAR, ALTHOUGH NONE OF HER FAMILY IN BIRMINGHAM MANAGED TO HEAR IT. "WE COULDN'T RECEIVE IT HERE," SHE SAYS.

THE PIRATE RADIO STATION I LISTENED TO WAS CAROLINE, ESPECIALLY JOHNNIE WALKER'S SHOWS. BUT MY PROGRAMME GOT A LOT OF FAN MAIL. A LOT OF MEN LIKED THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD STUFF! TO BE HONEST, I HAD NO REAL AMBITIONS TO BE A DJ. YOU HAVE TO KNOW ABOUT THE RECORDS YOU PLAY, AND I WAS REALLY ONLY INTERESTED IN SINGING". BORN IN BALSALL HEATH, JILL ATTENDED HOPE STREET SCHOOL, THEN CROPWOOD OPEN AIR SCHOOL NEAR BROMSGROVE. JILL BEGAN SINGING, USING THE STAGE NAME BOBBIE EMBER, WITH BIG BANDS AT BIRMINGHAM CITY CENTRE VENUES THE WEST END AND THE CASINO. HER HUSBAND DON — THEY WERE MARRIED ON CHRISTMAS EVE 1956 — REALISED THAT HIS WIFE HAD TALENT AND GOT HER AN AUDITION FOR OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS. SHE WAS CHOSEN FOR THE SHOW, BUT ALTHOUGH SHE RECALLS THAT HER RENDITION OF THE SONG "WHERE ARE YOU?" WAS A TRIUMPH, SHE WAS BEATEN ON THE PUBLIC VOTE BY A MAN WITH A TALKING DOG! ALL THOUGH WAS NOT LOST... "I WAS SPOTTED BY SOMEBODY WHO WANTED TO MANAGE ME," SHE SAYS. TWO SINGLES FOR POLYDOR AND PARLOPHONE WERE RELEASED — WHY CAN'T YOU BRING ME HOME (AS BOBBIE EMBER) AND I FOUND MY LOVE TODAY (AS SAMANTHA LEIGH). UNFORTUNATELY THEY WERE NOT HITS BECAUSE, IRONICALLY, THEY GOT LITTLE AIRPLAY ON THE RADIO.

