



YOUNG MEN WITH WINGS

When Hoboken popsters the Bongos took flight in the '80s, they positively soared.

THE BONGOS

Phantom Train

RICHARD BARONE

Cool Blue Halo

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Each subject recently contacted by Masters & Johnson research checked "10: extremely pleased" on the form meant to ascertain the Bongos' best material from the '80s, an occasionally maligned decade. However, all those interviewed chose a different song. Could this rock combo from Hoboken, New Jersey possibly be etched in the collective memory for so many different ditties? This happens every so often in the inexact science of sociological research. But how were we to determine the finest material of lead vocalist/guitarist Richard Barone, bassist Rob Norris and drummer Frank Giannini who formed the Bongos in 1980, according to these young men—well, not so young now—and added guitarist James Mastro sometime later? Was the elite Bongos song permanently entered in our data base to be an early title like "Numbers With Wings," "Bulrushes," "Barbarella—or perhaps some dark-horse, later entry?

Now we find two more additions to the database. A "new" album by these same Bongos bears the title *Phantom Train*, although it was apparently recorded in 1985. Even so, two of its songs, "My Wildest Dreams" and "Diamond Guitar," seem quite pleasantly raucous. And a number listed as "Sunshine Superman," written by a person known as Donovan, also seems most agreeable with such lines as "we sat on a beach at sunset." Imagine that! Finally, we must note a solo release by Bongos singer, Richard Barone, available now in two different formats. One is a reissue of the original 1987 live album *Cool Blue Halo*. It has nine bonus tracks added. Then there is the 25th anniversary edition of the same album containing two bonus discs of material, one a live DVD. It should be noted that complex events like these only confuse sociological researchers. In any event, quite pleasant stuff, we must admit.

This just in: Barone recently admitted, "The Bongos loved playing Max's Kansas City, especially those late, crazy shows with that trans-sexual thing." Now that's more like it!

—JUD COST

DOWNLOAD: "My Wildest Dreams," "Diamond Guitar"

Why So Serious?

RICHARD BARONE on his career, the Bongos—and Jack Benny?!?

—JUD COST

I first saw the Bongos in 1982 and was stunned by your live sound, easily the best I've ever heard.

BARONE: From the beginning to now, we've always insisted on having a great sound guy tour with us. We thought the show should always sound as good as the recordings.

I have a theory that there would have been no R.E.M. without the Bongos.

Oh, absolutely true. Of course. I think I agree with you, but I'd also like to maintain my modesty. They're friends of ours, so it's not for me to say. Pop music is all in the air, and everybody takes influences from everybody else. I'm very close to them since the days of our early shows. Pete Buck's always been very complimentary and has thanked me many times for the chords. Those guys stayed with us in Hoboken when they got started. And whenever we played in Athens, they were there to support us.

Did you ever see Television live? They were the one New York band of that era that never gets as much praise as they deserved. I saw them in the spring of '77 on their first California tour, and they were a real eye-opener.

I never saw them live. I bought the records as a kid in Florida. As much as I came to love the Talking Heads, that first LP was just a little too quirky for my tastes. But I really liked the somber majesty of Television.

Mick Rock mentioned on the dedication page of your book [2007 memoir *Frontman*] that to be a good frontman you had to have a good sense of humor. Explain what that means to you.

Well, you've gotta be able to laugh off a lot of stuff. If you're gonna take yourself too seriously, or get pissed-off too easily, think what happens then. And I've seen a few, like Oasis. I think I have a good sense of humor. One of my heroes is Jack Benny. You have to be able to laugh at yourself, and Jack certainly could do that. I like self-effacing humor.

I love that Jack Benny bit where he's being held up by a robber who demands, "Your money or your life!" After 20 seconds of silence, Jack finally answers, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking!"

Somebody posted a video on You Tube of me working in my studio, and my timing was exactly like Jack Benny. Music and humor go really well together. That's my problem with some bands. They take themselves way too seriously. That's so boring. My theory is that some frontmen think that having a sense of humor makes them less sexy. I mean, you have to have fun in bed.

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