Powered by: Hunterdon County Democrat

Search

Sian in I Join

Q

N.J. NEWS

LOCAL NEWS

N.J. POLITICS

SPORTS

H.S. SPORTS brought TI



Find n Save Fashion Health Home & garden Parenting Special sections Travel Weddings Forums More living

Hoboken's Bongos ride the Phantom' the future

Print (http://blog.ni.com/hobokennow_impact/print.html?

entry=/2013/10/hobokens bongos ride the phant.html)

(http://connect.ni.com/user/jimtesta/index.html) By Jim Testa/For The Jersey Journal (http://connect.ni.com/user/iimtesta/posts.html)

on October 03, 2013 at 11:27 AM, updated October 03, 2013 at 12:28 PM

When the Bongos reunited for Maxwell's closing gala back in July, frontman Richard

Barone surprised everyone there by announcing that the band would be releasing a new album in 2013... sort of.

The Bongos – the first Hoboken band to garner national attention from the nascent Maxwell's scene back in the early Eighties - started working on Phantom Train back in 1986, as the follow-up to their RCA Records full-length Beat Hotel, .



The Bongos today, posing in front of Maxwell's on the day of the iconic club's closing-day celebration.

Photo by Chad Kamenshine

But the album - released on October 1 by the newly-revived Jem Records - has never been heard until now.

Phantom Train strikes a perfect balance between the effervescent bubblegum-pop of the Bongos' early singles (collected on the album Drums Along The Hudson,) the more grandiose post-new wave guitar rock of the "Numbers With Wings" EP, and the sophisticated rhythms and song structures the group explored on Beat Hotel. Several of the songs on Phantom Train found their way onto Barone's chamber-pop solo albums, albeit in drastically reconfigured arrangements; but for the most part, the album represents a treasure trove of lost songs - including a playfully psychedelic cover of Donovan's "Sunshine Superman" - that have remained buried for over 25 years.

We met with Richard Barone in his Greenwich Village apartment and asked why Phantom Train remained unreleased for so long. The story begins with the four Bongos - Barone, bassist Rob Norris, guitarist James Mastro, and drummer Frank Giannini wondering what to do when they found themselves in an untenable situation at RCA Records.

"When we did 'Numbers With Wings' at RCA, it was wonderful and everything we had hoped for," Barone recalled. "The video was on MTV, we got radio play, we toured relentlessly. But by the time we had finished recording Beat Hotel, everyone who had brought us on board at RCA had left. Nancy Jeffries, who had signed us, was gone. No one there even knew or cared we were still on the label. The album came out and the label didn't do a thing with it. We knew we had to make a change."

So the Bongos asked for their release, just as Chris Blackwell, the founder of Island Records, expressed an interest. "Chris was a big fan of the Bongos," Barone said. "And so he invited us to come to his studio Compass Point to record some demos and see what happened."

And so the four Bongos left Hoboken and flew to the Bahamas, where they recorded much of Phantom Train in the same legendary studio that had hosted superstars like AC/DC, the Rolling Stones, and U2.

"Here's the thing that nobody really ever knew," Barone added. "We were never signed to Island Records. By the time we were recording, Chris had started to get into the film business and he was spending less and less time overseeing the label." So the Bongos flew home with the master tapes to the sessions in their laps, and hoped for the best.

But by the time the Bongos got back to America, things had started to change for the group. "It was right around that time that I started playing solo gigs," Barone said. "I was still in the Bongos and still loved playing with the band, but I really loved playing those solo shows in more intimate spaces too. And everybody else just got really busy doing other things." Jim Mastro formed the band Strange Cave, Norris was working on his career as a massage therapist, Frank Giannini had started a family.

Barone explained that the Phantom Train sessions consisted of many sessions in which they taped multiple takes of the same songs, as well as additional recording that was completed in New Jersey and New York City.

"There was a lot of very time-consuming work that had to be done to listen to all those different takes and none of us had the time to do it back then," he said. So weeks became months, and months became years, And the years stretched into decades without Phantom Train ever being finished.

Barone finally found the impetus to complete the project when old friend Marty Scott announced that he wanted to restart his old label Jem Records (which had released Drums Along The Hudson in the U.S.)

"It really took a lot of time," Barone explained. "First those old tapes had to be baked in a convection oven so they wouldn't fall apart. The companies that made recording tape in the old days did the right thing for the environment by leaving out certain chemicals but what they did was bad for the longevity of the tape itself. Once the tapes had been baked, I was able to transfer them all to digital and then get to the process of mixing everything down."

Barone found such an embarrassment of riches on those tapes that one song, "My Wildest Dreams," appears twice on the album with completely different arrangements.

As for the future, the Bongos intend on playing more shows whenever their schedules permit. Norris has lived in Woodstock, New York for decades, Mastro owns Hoboken's Guitar Bar and Guitar Bar Jr., and Barone not only teaches performing arts at NYU but still tours and performs regularly. "I'm still a troubadour, traveling from town to town playing my songs," he said. "Marty (Scott) really wants the Bongos to play as much as possible to promote the album but I've been doing most of it myself, just because the others are busy with other things."

Fans will get a chance to see the Bongos perform for the CMJ Music Marathon at the Living Room (http://www.livingroomny.com/artist/bongos) in Manhattan on Tuesday, October 15 at 8 pm. Standing room tickets are available for \$20 from Ticketweb.com (http://www.ticketweb.com/t3/sale/SaleEventDetail? dispatch=loadSelectionData&eventId=3793244&pl=livingroom) along with seated VIP seats for \$45.

JESSE NAHEM, RIP

The Hoboken musical community lost a precious member of its extended family when Jesse "Sanwich" Nahem, 25, passed away in his sleep this past Sunday night. Jesse, like his mom Alice Genese, was a gifted bassist, born and raised in Hoboken. We spoke to his mom Alice about her teenage years growing up a few doors away from Maxwell's back in July

(http://www.nj.com/hobokennow/index.ssf/2013/06/alice_genese_and_karyn_eonidex.ssf/2013/06/alice_genese_and_baryn_eonidex.ssf/2013/06/alice_genese_and_baryn_eonidex.ssf/2013/06/alice_genese_and_baryn_eonidex.ssf/2013/06/alice_genese_and_baryn_eonidex.ssf/2013/06/alice_genese_and_bar and we reviewed Jesse's metal band Swamp around the same time.

(http://www.nj.com/hobokennow/index.ssf/2013/07/next_generation_of_new_jerse I can remember Alice pushing Jesse up and down Washington Street in his stroller as an infant, and Jesse as a strapping young teen skateboarding around town. Recently he had been performing with his mom's band Alice KG & The Flirty Three as well as his own group, and like his mother, had become a treasured member of Hoboken's musical

Vi

N.V vict (htt

leds

Sa (h

(h

re plac

Tre

Mos

551 (http: comm

349 (http:/ comm

317 (http:/ comm

309

264 (http:/ comm

group, and like the mother, had become a treasured member of hoborens musical community. He grew into a fine young man, a warm and loving soul who will be sorely missed. All relatives and friends are invited to attend a celebration of Jesse's life on Thursday, October 3 2013, from 2 to 4 & 7 to 9 PM at the Lawton-Turso Funeral Home (633 Washington Street, Hoboken, NJ.) Donations to your favorite charity in his memory will be deeply appreciated by the family. - Jim Testa +(http:/ com :: (http:/ Pottstown, PA Pottstown, PA # (http:/ **Related Stories** 0;0;98 120/6 http:// (http:/ (http://www.nj.com/hobokennow/index (http://www.nj.com/hobokennow/index Hoboken Music Awards cast wide net Nelson Pla enlists Hoboken rockers to (http:/ for 2013 honorees celebrate publication of his book of art, (http://www.nj.com/hobokennow/index essays, and haiku (http://www.nj.com/hobokennow/index Sign in with your NJ.com, Facebook or Google account or sign up -(https://signup.nj.com/register/?return_to=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nj.com%2Fhobokennow%2Findex.ssf%2F2013%2F10%2Fhobokens_bo Leave a comment... Please review the Community Rules (http://www.nj.com/forums/index.ssf?rules.html) before posting eid=207 Comments (0) -Shared (6) **Popular Topics** pause live updates No items at this time... **Best of NJ.com** (http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf (http://www.nj.com/entertainment/ (http://

of) 'Boardwalk Empire' recap: Nov. 17

episode

of) So w

week?

of) 10 tips to find Black Friday deals

(http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf