



**The Bongos,  
*Phantom Train*  
(JEM Records):**

With the recent shuttering of Hoboken's famed rock venue Maxwell's, one of the club's (and the city's) most famous exports, **The Bongos**, stepped back into the spotlight to bid it goodbye as the last act to perform there. Fronted by **Richard Barone** and **James Mastro** (now playing with **Ian Hunter**), the group was one of the first "college rock" bands, scoring alterna-hits like "In the Congo" and "Numbers with Wings." This reissued album was originally recorded in 1986 after the band's final **RCA** album, '85's *Beat Hotel*, but never saw the light of day, and marks a reunion with the just-revived **JEM** label owner **Marty Scott**, who released the group's 1982 full-length debut, *Drums Along the Hudson*, on the **PVC** imprint of his then vital Plainfield, NJ, import distributor. The remixed 14-track package, which features three previously unreleased recordings, offers the martial rhythms and shiny, tick-tock techno-pop hooks of the '80s on tracks like the first single, "My Wildest Dreams," which also combines British invasion vibes straight out of the **Stones'** "Under My Thumb:" and the shiny new **Cars** smell of "One Bold Stroke." At the same time, Primal Barone influences like **T. Rex**, **John Lennon** and **Iggy** circa "Gimme Danger" slip their way into the cover of **Donovan's** "Sunshine Superman," the psychedelic "Saturn Eyes" and the doomy "Roman Circus," respectively. One of the unreleased demos, "Under Someone's Spell," proves the hidden link between **the Feelies** and **Neil Diamond's** "Cherry Cherry," while "Run to the Wild" echoes "Number with Wings" and the title track offers a moody, melodic harbinger of **The Shins** that makes you wonder what a collaboration between Barone and **Danger Mouse** might sound like. Reuniting the Bongos is just the latest move for its very active founder, who last year issued, with the help of **Digsn's Jay Frank**, a deluxe edition of his solo album, *Cool Blue Halo* (a lyric copped from the this album's ultimate narcissist's ode to onanism, "I Belong to Me"), that included a live performance of the record and a DVD documentary about the making of the original. It's kind of poetic justice that The Bongos emerge like a phoenix from the ashes of the place they once called home.

- Roy Trakin