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CMJ MUSIC MARATHON: THE BONGOS AT THE LIVING ROOM, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15TH, 2013, REVIEWED

WRITTEN BY IMAN LABABEDI
THURSDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2013 00:10
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The Bongos run to the wild

It's an axiom that you can tell the strength of a set by the covers the band plays, in which case the Bongos were as good as I thought they were at the record release party cum CMJ performance at the Living Room Tuesday night. An early "Sunshine Superman", off *Phantom Train*, was followed by a double encore, "Love Is Everywhere" and "Mambo Sun" to take us home.

All three were highlights, but so was everything else. The Bongos were Richard Barone's follow up to the seminal early 1980s power pop "a" and in retrospect, they may well have been the best of all those great bands, the dBs, the Individuals, all that lot. Or perhaps they just sound like the best today. The song constructions are so angular and quirky, it is like pop in a broken blender. "In The Congo" takes a T Rex lick and runs with it, and Richard, who looks better at 50 something then he did at 24, can't stop smiling as he takes and charges the band through it. It is both slick and garage, a set highlight, or at least I thought it would be, but the band are so good tonight it is just a place setting. Bassist Rob Norris and drummer Frank Giannni have been with the band since its inception and second guitarist James Maestro joined them soon after the release of their debut album in 1982, the unspeakably wonderful *Drums On the Hudson*.

The Bongos broke up in 1987 but have performed the occasional gig since 2006, here and there. And after closing down Maxwell's earlier this year, the Hoboken natives got together with former Jem records President Marty Scott and released their 'missing link' album *Phantom Train* on October 1st, recorded in the Bahamas back in 1985 On the strength of their high spirited and good humored set, I hope they are recording again.

A just about flawless hour that had the audience chiming in by the third song "Tiger Nights" and never got loose from Barone's loose iron grip. The looseness is in the delivery, the effortless of Barone's personality, but the grip is in the rhythm. Now, more than ever, the Bongos come across as harbingers of sounds yet to come, Richard mentioned [Yoko Ono](#) and like the Plastic Ono Band, the Bongos were out of time.30 years after these songs were recorded, they are still ahead of the time. The rhythms aren't angular, the way House is, but they curve outwards and they carry the melodies with them. The kick (and I did some of the kicking) was that Barone could arrange a song but not write a good enough melody. Watching the band today the complaint is simply bizarre.

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Still, I did have a problem with the set. While I found Barone's introduction to a song off the new album very funny, he offered Ru Paul "In The Congo", Ru Paul though Richard had said "Run To The Wild", rather than contradict the famous transvestite, Richard ran home and wrote a new song with that title. A great song. But other stuff, the band banter, stifles the set flow and could well be toned down. Oh, and the set needed one more original song for the encore, perhaps they could've left "Barbarella" for last.

But as far as complaints go, that's about it. Every single song in the set was a gem., Richard, back in black with a Gibson strapped to him at all time, looked slim and handsome, every inch a rock star and the band were excellent musical foil. The rhythmss were so jumpy it is like somebody spiked amphetamines into their juice, the melodies so unique, the songs played in the back of your mind after the set was over. Plus, I got to hang with rock nyc writer Robert Ross and his wife Liz Ross, which is always a pleasure and Robert gave me a copy of the new Bongos album and hopes to be in the studio next year with his own album!

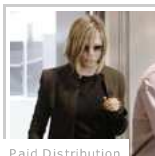
All in all, a terrific set. The Bongos should go [full throttle](#) deeper into the 21st century, the world is catching up with them.

Grade: A-

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