



* Big Daddy * Big Da hile their homage to legends such as Buddy Holly. Dion and the Belmonts, and the Everly Brothers served as a foundation from which to reinterpret the new hits of the day. tunes such as "Eye of the Tiger" Superfreak," and "jump" seemed all the better for having been made over with their intricate phrasing, vocal work (including doo-wops, shoo-wops, and appropriately placed hiccups), sax solos, and twangy guitar sounds that were quintessential '50s.

A radio disc jockey in Detroit introduced the Big Daddy concept as a "meltdown of sorts" that happened after inadvertently leaving his copy of Barry Manilow's "I Write the Songs" to bake on the window sill on top of the '57'rec rd "At the Hop" by Danny and the Juniors.

A more complicated story is told on the back of the very first album, What Really Happened to the Band of '59 (Rhino, 1983).

What became known as "the Laotian Capture Story" had our heroes held hostage (and removed from contemporary Western music) in Southeast Asia for almost twenty-five years. But it was far from this concocted adventure, in West Los Angeles, that passion, preparedness and opportunity converged.

The Rhino Years (1982-1992)

Co-founding Big Daddy member, Bob Wayne, a recording engineer, also known for Dr. Demento-esque songwriting and producing, met Richard Foos and Harold Bronson in the mid-'70s, during their heyday of creating novelty projects (Temple City Kazoo Orchestra, International Elvis Impersonators Convention) on

their indie label, Rhino Records. Harold recalls that "At that time Rhino was doing 2-3 original projects per year." Needing a recording studio and a likeminded engineer/producer, they brought these projects to Bob at his West LA facility, Sunburst Recording. Richard recalls, "We all had a fondness for an album by Godfrey Daniel called, Take a Sad Song

(Atlantic Records, 1972). The record was brilliant, but it didn't do well... the retail store (Rhino Records on Westwood Boulevard) had gotten a hundred surplus copies for free." (Note:

ironically. IBig Daddy's "Eye of the Tiger" and Godfrey Daniel's "Whole Lotta Love" both appear on Rhino's 2001 Doo Wop Box III). Richard and Harold thought the concept of taking contemporary songs and arranging them in the styles of 1950s rock and rhythm & blues was intriguing enough to offer Bob a chance to expand on it with his oldies band, Big Daddy, which was regrouping after having

The Big Daddy lineap in 1988: Clockwise fro beatsik": Vinea Cipu Tom Lee, Jim Reeves, Don Raymond, Cary Hoffman, Marty Kaniger, Bob Wayne

disbanded in the late '70s. The original members already had assembled once in 1982 at Bob's studio to record Marty's original song, a raw cult classic, "It's So Hard to Say I Love You When You're Sitting on My Face" but that's another story.

Founding members, Marty Kaniger (lead

vocals, rhythm guitar), and Bob Wayne (lead vocals), classmates and fellow pranksters (elementary through high school), and Gary Hoffman (drums and background vocals), themselves children of the '50s, were adept in knowing the day's musical influences. Marty, a traditional style doo-wop tenor, had a keen eye for '50s detail, clothing, and mannerisms; Gary was familiar with '50s.

rhythms; and Bob, a baritone belter, had an uncanny knack for recalling popular and obscure recordings. Dave Starns (lead vocals, lead guitar), "choirboy" tenor, was the youngest band member, and had missed most things '50s, but had a great ear for harmony. Tom Lee (lead vocals, rhythm guitar) - a soulful bass singer - was the fifth member of the original lineup. The first album was, in

> Dave's words, "a learning process." The group's singers all had distinctively different lead voices, which made it a challenge, initially, to achieve an ensemble blend.

The title of the first album, Big Daddy What Really Happened to the Band of '59, Bob explained, is a take-off on the book, What Really Happened to the Class of '65? by former Palisades High classmates David Wallechinsky and Michael Medved. (Side note: Another book *Midterm Report - the Class of '65" by Wallechinsky, [Viking Books, 1986,] contains a lively chapter on Marty entitled "The Singer: Marty Kaniger.")

The album generated a buzz in the press locally in Los Angeles and nationally with People magazine proclaiming it "a delightful time warp... musical

Putting a performing band together was made easier, because Big Daddy had previously gone through several incarnations as an oldies band.

Originally called "Big Daddy Dipstick and the Lube Jobs," the band started playing around 1971 at Regular Johns, a restaurant in



Angeles. Bob recalls that "Marty had a solo gig there five nights a week, and a few of us would sit in on weekends and play a mixture of oldies while dressed up

COOL AND STRANGE MUSIC

Issue Number Twenty-Four! Feb. '02 · May '02



Ries

Ship

Dadly

Rip

177

8

Sign

ŝ

Sign

đ

9

Sup

In The Beginning: A 1985 shot of the first lineup

greaser style, a la Sha Na Na - it was very loose and fun. Bob was the '50s freak," Marty recalls. "He was also big on props and had a suitcase full of toys.

However, the Big Daddy that emerged with the release of What Really Hanpened... saw the transformation of members into their '50s personifications and a show with a lot of surprises. By their first official show, band members had shaved their beards off and Dippity Doo'd their hair (Marty confirms it was actually Spritz Forte and Dep). They had a home base at a local club, At My Place, in Santa Monica, and performed regularly for diehard fans that would climb mountains (or at least drive several hours on the 405 freeway) to make it to each and every show. I asked fan and former commuter, Shirley Peterson, what drew her to that kind of dedication. "What those guys did to the sonos was perfect and cracked me up every time," says Shirley, a selfconfessed "groupie," who "would have loved to have been in their road crew."

More Than a One-Shot Wonder

By the second album, "Meanwhile... Back in the States," (referencing a Cadets' 45) fullblown characters had emerged: "Marty the K" as the straight man (and mother hen) of the group; "Lightnin' Bob," energetic, unpredictable and sporting lightning bolt lamé; Tom Lee as the irrepressible but lovable "Bubba"; Dave as the "Collegiate"; John Hatton, "Spazz," and the nerd (stand-up bass); Gary as "Cubby"the Mickey Mouse drummer; Vince Ciaverella, 'The Beatnik" (piano & organ); and Jim Reeves as "The Hoodlum" (sax & flute). The show was non-stop zaniness with visual parody upon musical parody as was the case with the Big Daddy version of "Chariots of Fire." To a Ventures'-style instrumental, Marty, "the K" would come running in from the background wearing white gym shorts three sizes too big (making his pipe-cleaner legs and frame look all the more thin), proudly Be a popose to a suppose to a suppose to s carrying the Olympic torch (which in this case was a brightly lit toilet plunger). "Eye of the Tiger" was sung a cappella around a trash can lit-up as if it were a bonfire on the streets of New York City, circa the 1950s, followed by Tom "Bubba" Lee singing "Ebony and Ivory" as a sermonizing Little Richard-gone-awry.

ddy * Big Daddy * Big

What started as a one-off recording project blossomed into radio, TV and concert tours in the U.S., the U.K. (even opening for Gary Glitter at Wembley Arena), Germany, Australia, and a total of four records on Rhino - all recorded at Sunburst. Songs were chosen based on their potential to be familiar for years to come and conduciveness for quirky ambiguity. The process was a democratic one; the records were, in the words of Gary Hoffman, "gang-produced."



Big Daddy's brilliant 1992 "Sgt. Pepper's" album

charts. A video was quickly produced, with disastrous results, causing Godley and Creme of the band 10cc to critique that "Stevie Wonder could have done a better job directing." Those hit record days and the month-long

"Dancing..." became a hit single on the British

tour of England are fondly remembered. Dave recalls a shoe salesman, who, while helping him and John, heard Big Daddy's version of "Dancing..." on the store's radio and exclaimed "Imagine that, they've taken a decent song and ruined it!" Dave also recalls the excitement when Big Daddy's version of 'Dancing..." jumped ahead of Springsteen's version on the charts. "You could hear our version playing on three radio stations simultaneously," Gary recalls. And Marty

Big

Ы

Sign

ş

Baddy

Big

b

2addy

84

Big

Baddy

Bug

Baddy

Rep

ы

remembers hearing the clanging of trashcans below their hotel window, and the trash man whistling the song, as if it was 'helping him get through his day.' That's when I felt that we had done something, given a little something to the world, performed a service." In excess of 80,000 units of the EP were sold, and the record peaked at Number 21 on the British national charts.

'Stranded in the Jungle" (1991)

"Stranded in the Jungle" (that Cadets' song again), written and directed by Ira Heffler, was based on the band's story of emergence and assimilation after their long Laotian captivity. Meant to promote the release of their CD. Cutting Their Own Groove, the play featured all eight Big Daddy members and had a successful 8-week run at The Groundlings Theatre in LA.

"Sgt. Peppers" (1992)

Recognizing that the '50s influence which inspired a rendition often outlived the shelf life of a pop hit, Big Daddy decided to tackle a classic album in its **5**9



The Big Daddy boys head off to entertain our troops in 1991

British Chartmakers (1985)

The band was already working on the second album when the British label Making Waves wanted to release a 4song EP with a bonus cut. "Dancing in the Dark" (a la Pat Boone's '61 hit, "Moody River"), from the yet to be

released Meanwhile... Back in the States, was chosen because the Springsteen original was then on the charts. Trevor Dann, the producer of the successful BBC TV show Old Grey Whistle Test, made the choice to have the band perform "Dancing in the Dark" (along with "Ebony and Ivory") live on the show. The response was huge and immediate, and · hyport beg · hyp

Issue Number Twenty-Four! Feb. '02 - May '02

COOL AND STRANGE MUSIC!

BIG DADDY (CONT from Pe 7)

1

8

Sup

Sup

Brip

ð

đ

entirety, and Sgt. Peppers was released twenty-five years to the day (June 2nd) after the Beatle's release. The songs - all in their original order - are reinterpreted in the style of the '50s artists that the Beatles credit for their own inspiration - resulting in a "tribute upon a tribute."

Among the highlights are Don Raymond, (who replaced Dave Starms in late '86) singing a rendition of "With a Little Help From My Friends," reminiscent of Johnny Mathis' "Chances Are" with a Ray Conniff Orchestra-styled string and flute arrangement by Big Daddy's own John Hatton; "Within You, Without You" featuring Tom Lee as beat poet, and finally, "A Day in the Life," with Marty paying tribute to Buddy Holly - (complete with sustained end note and backward message). Oddly, the album wasn't released in England - it could only be found as an import - which was a major disappointment to the band. Though critically acclaimed, Big Daddy's Sgt. Peppers sold only 20,000 units and was their last record on Rhino.

Accolades and not (1983-1992)

Amidst consistently positive press, often commenting that the band's renditions were better than the hitmakers', it was also reassuring that they were appreciated by artists themselves. David Byrne, when interviewed for Detail's magazine (March, 1992), was asked about other people's versions of his Talking Heads material, and replied, "... Big Daddy did a really funny version of Once in a Lifetime - it was like doo-wop calypso." Albert Lee, guitarist for the Everly Brothers while they were recording at Sunburst, is noted to have said that Don and Phil Everty loved hearing their influence on "Superfreak." Richard Pryor, John Candy, members of the Eagles and Van Halen were also reportedly among the group's fans.

However, Big Daddy's renditions could stir up controversy. Such as with "In the Living Years," (Cutting Their Own Groove) which was removed from the CD lineup in some countries - as the "Leader of the Pack" treatment. (including references to "Deadmans' Curve. and not wearing a helmet), seemed insensitive to the moving tribute that artist Mike Rutherford had meant for his late father. "Jump" (Meanwhile... Back in the States) introduced a "Summertime Blues" riff which prompted Eddie Cochran's mother to seek and receive a

settlement with Rhino.

The Sun Also Sets (1994)

1984-1993 were years of heavy performing that took a toll on members' family life and other career pursuits. Dave left the group in late '86, moving his family back to his hometown, Hammond,

Louisiana. Tom Lee followed suit in '94. moving back to Detroit, Michigan. At My Place closed in the early '90s. Marty recalls that concept gigs dwindled, while corporate 'theme-parties' and shows at Nevada casinos (though more lucrative)

Big I addy . Big Daddy . Big Daddy



The final Big Daddy lineup in 1994: L to R: Tem Lee, Damon DeGrignon, Don Raymond, Bob Wayne, Bob Sandman, John Hatton and Marty Kanigar

became the routine.

Finally, "it was too many years of playing "Rock Around the Clock." Radio's lack of reception and an endless run of ineffectual managers contributed to flat record sales and frustrated both the group and Rhino. Richard Foos laments, "It was difficult to market Big Daddy, and a disappointment that they never achieved the success they deserved."

"Chantmania" (1994), "Grease" (1998), etc.

Big Daddy's collaborations have happened throughout their run (and still occur today) including original songs written and recorded for the indie film, The Hideous Sun Demons, The Special Edition (1984), featuring a then unknown Jay Leno; jingles including original music for The Lincoln Park Zoo (nominated) for a Clio in 1986), and music produced for and performed on-camera in the film Book of Love (New Line Cinema, 1991). to a philad field a p

In 1994, Rhino approached Bob about doing a parody of the successful record, Chant, by the Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo de Silos. Although it wasn't a Big Daddy project per se, Chantmania captured the voices of Don Raymond, Marty Kaniger, and Bob Wayne (multi-tracked with ultra-cathedral reverb) on irreverent reinterpretations, Gregorian Chant-style, such

Bug

Doddy

Baddy

Daddy

Daddy

as "Hey, Hey We're the Monks," "We Will Rock You," and "Losing My Religion." Chantmania became Rhino's most successful original recording, selling in excess of 100,000 units.

Big Daddy has backed up Lesley Gore, Lou Christie, Darlene Love, Freddy Cannon, and were themselves featured on the compilation

Grease is the Word (Rhino, '98) which covered songs from Grease with original '50s stars from the period.

The Spirit Goes On

Big Daddy reunited in 1997 for a tribute concert in memory of former band member and charismatic sax man, Bob "Guido" Sandman, Bob Wayne, reflecting back on the evening, calls it "a nostalgic band meeting a nostalgic moment."

...And On and On

In 2000, Oglio Records released The Best of Big Daddy, including tracks from all four albums plus "Little Red Corvette" (recorded live, 1989), "Sukiyaki" (Japanese-only release, 1992) and the newly recorded "My Heart Will Go On"

(from the film Titanic). Even though Big Daddy is no longer performing and all four Rhino releases are out of print, a fan-based Web site <www.bigdaddyfan.com> remains active, The Best of ... CD is still available, and a new crop of tunes, ripe for transformation, abounds.



- @ 2002 Regina Klein

The editor would like to thank Bob Wayne, Mark Johnson at <www.bigdaddylan.com>. and Mike Smith at Oglio Entertainment.

Issue Number Twenty-Four! Feb. '02 - May '02

COOL AND STRANGE MUSICI