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Boomertown

A blog about Houston boomers and the people and issues that make them tick

Joe Baiardi keeping the spirit of the '60s alive

Thursday, June 27, 2013

Peter Noone of Herman's Hermits, center, joins The Fab 5 backstage at the Stafford Centre last August. The Fab 5, from left, includes Chuck Essick, Joe Baiardi, Rod Robert, John Lassen and Paul Byron. (Photo courtesy of Joe Baiardi)

(Interview conducted and edited by Rick Campbell)

Music from the '60s has been the soundtrack of **Joe Baiardi**'s life since practically the beginning. He grew up in New York City, and music was a constant presence in his home. His parents loved pop music of all kinds. In 1969, when he was somewhere around the age of 5, his mother gave him his first **Beatles** record — ***Get Back*** — while he was recuperating from a tonsillectomy. He was hooked.

Nearly 45 years later, he can be found on stage with **The Fab 5**, playing left-handed bass like one of his heroes, **Paul McCartney**, while performing music by the Beatles and other **British Invasion**-era bands.

In his other life, Baiardi, 49, works in a project control group for a Houston engineering company. In the past couple of years, he's also evolved into somewhat of the keeper of the Houston '60s music scene flame.

How long have you been playing Beatles music?

I've been performing Beatles music since 1980, when I had my first tribute band "Rubber Soul" in NYC. We won a few "sound

Poster for the Moving Sidewalks reunion show March 30 in New York City, designed by Joe Baiardi.

alike" contests at Beatlefest in the early '80s. In 1988, I moved from New York to Texas, so I was away from it for about 12 years and at that time and during that time my daughter Andrea was born and I started writing my own music. In 2000, I started performing Beatles/'60s again with different tribute bands across the country (Cast of Beatlemania, Come Together and Beat Club). Then in February 2003, I joined The Fab 5. Today, The Fab 5 performs six to nine times a month, every month, every year.

What's it like to play concerts with legends such as Peter Noone, America and Three Dog Night?

We actually pinch ourselves thinking, "How did we get here?" It's hard to believe that we are performing with some of the musicians we idolized as young kids. They all have been so nice to us and really appreciate the attention to detail we give to the music, gear and clothes.

Any conflicts with your day job?

Luckily, no, with the exception of being tired sometimes after a three-gig weekend. My Client Program Director is even a fan, as well as my co-workers. They all think it's cool.

What drives your love for the '60s?

Plain and simple: The music. (Plus we love vintage clothes, guitars and cars.) It was a testimony to the changes that were happening in our world at that time. It was a time of innocence. I think people who listen to '60s music nowadays are trying to plug into something that was special to their parents and they want to follow suit, to find out what it was all about. Some kids listening to '60s music just dig it. It is music that is timeless in a respect. There was a subtle revolution going on, and a lot of the bands pushed the envelope as much as they could. Back then you could be 16, put a band together with your friends, release a local single, get local radio airplay and maybe open up for a national recording act that comes through your town. That could lead to a major label to sign you and you could become stars! Those things do not happen anymore.

How did you evolve into a keeper of the Houston '60s flame?

This started with loving the band **Thursday's Children** and their song "Try Girl." I had no idea that my friend **Ezra Charles** was the keyboardist/vocalist/songwriter. I didn't realize he was at one time **Charles Helpinstill**. So I told him "I didn't know you were in Thursday's Children." And he replied, "What rock have you been living under?" Since I didn't grow up in Houston, I had no clue. I've since also become good friends with Richard Gollwitzer, the band's drummer. So I started my research on all my favorite bands and what these musicians were doing today. In my quest, I got to be friends with members from the **Moving Sidewalks**, The Glass Kans, the **Sixpentz**, the **Surf Knights**, **The Coastliners**, The Pastels and quite a few others. I also wanted to see the studios where this music was created only to find only that **Goldstar (Sugarhill)** was the only one still operating as a studio. My favorite recordings came from **Andrus Productions** (now a machine shop which I was able to visit recently), **Doyle Jones Studio** (demolished and now a two-story home) and **Duke/Peacock Studio** (now a church). I could not believe Houston had not done anything to landmark or preserve these historic R&R places of our musical past. I am happy to hear that Allen's Landing is finally being restored (once home to **David Adickes' Love Street Light Circus**). Houston was THE musical capital from the '40s through the '60s before Austin took over.

What kind of feedback are you getting from local musicians?

They love hearing about the history, people, and places of Houston's '60s music scene. It's opened a lot of eyes and ears to what was really happening here in Houston and where these clubs/studios once stood in their glory days.

You were one of the drivers behind the Houston Psych Garage happening. How did that come together?

This started with the re-mastered CD comp release of the Houston '60s band "The Surf Knights" and Tommy George wanted to have a CD release party at **Birraporetti's** downtown. He and **Dean Cook** wanted to "pass the torch" to The Fab 5 who were still playing that type of '60s music. We agreed and Tommy wanted to invite musicians from the '60s Houston scene to perform if they wished, in sort of an open-mike situation.

I had **Roy Head**'s cell number, so I asked Tommy to ring him up to see if he wanted to be involved. Roy said "yes", and would also bring his son **Sundance** and **Archie Bell** to sing. This changed everything. It became a rock 'n' roll show with The Fab 5, Little Big Rock (backing Roy and Archie), The Coastliners, **Liquid Blue**, **The Interns** and **Cadillac**

Johnson (**ZZ Top**’s first bassist) performing. The musicians didn’t care about not getting paid; they just wanted to be part of something special. Many of them also drove in from out of town. Scott Chambers (The Glass Kans) and Tommy George (Surf Knights/Big Sweet) were promoting the show with The Blues Hound on KPFT radio leading up to the event. Some of these folks had not seen each other in over 40 years.

Any plans for a repeat?

If the bands/musicians want to play, and the people will come, and we could cover all costs, I think this could turn into a successful and memorable yearly event.

What was it like to be in New York City at the Moving Sidewalks’ first show in more than 40 years?

It was an incredible experience. Dan Mitchell, Tom Moore, Don Summers and Billy Gibbons performed like it was 1968 all over again (without the flash pots!). There was no way you could tell that these four guys were apart these last 44 years musically. They all actively still played music since disbanding in ’69. The show was powerful and moving! My hat’s off to Billy for making this happen between his ZZ Top touring schedule. My involvement with Sidewalks started when I created a ’60s-style **Catacombs** poster, which I sent to them just for fun. Dan Mitchell and Billy Gibbons loved it and wanted to use it to promote their first reunion show in NYC on March 30 and had me put one together for their VIP ticket holders.

The Fab 5 is scheduled to open for the Moving Sidewalks in September at the Bayou Music Center. Any thoughts about that?

We are very excited about this show. It’s the 2013 Charity Ball for Deacons of Deadwood, which is a limited seated event **(deaconsofdeadwood.com)**. We are honored to be a part of this for a fourth year in a row, previously with **Blue Oyster Cult** and **Foghat**.

Moving Sidewalks and friends in New York City for their reunion show on March 30. From left are Tom Moore, Norma Baiardi, Don Summers, Billy Gibbons, Joe Baiardi and Dan Mitchell. (Photo courtesy of Joe Baiardi)

Joe Baiardi and Houston Sixties

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