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Retyped and reformatted for clarity

Reconstituted rock band will play first gig in Scituate

By Stephen Martin

September 1967. It was a steamy Saturday night, and the Surf Nantasket was crammed with close to 2,000 sweaty teens.

The Rockin' Ramrods had just finished their first set of the evening when a new band, as yet un-named, launched into a short, unannounced guest set. The group of four got the audience's attention with a singular rendition of *Don't Be Cruel*, and followed it up with an original ballad, newly written.

The title of the song was *Can't Find the Time (to Tell You)*, and no one there that night imagined that it would come to commemorate millions of Baby Boomer romances. The band would become known as Orpheus.

"It was a test marketing situation," remembers drummer Harry Sandler, now a vice president at the American Program Bureau, a lecture agency that books Larry King, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and other speakers. "We wanted to see if the material would fly. They loved us."

Of the famed Surf Nantasket, which existed where the Clarion Nantasket Beach Hotel now stands, Harry says, "It was the best place to go on the South Shore. It was a rite of passage for Boomers, a gathering ground for a beginning culture."

There were few places to go for rock & roll in those days. Local acts had to make do with CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) dances, college mixers, and town halls. The only other happening South Shore hotspot was the Mexicana Ballroom in Marshfield. It was to those two venues that The Animals, The Beach Boys, The Kingsmen, and Barry and The Remains came to play. Opening acts included such Bay area staples as The Ramrods, The Pilgrims, The Techniques, and The Mods, a surf band with whom Sandler had previously played.



Band in Boston – Four members of the '60s band Orpheus have teamed with two other musicians to perform as Orpheus Reborn. Their motto? 'This is not your father's Orpheus.' Times reporter Steve Martin is at far right ...

Earlier in '67, Harry had left The Mods and hooked up with Worcester musicians Bruce Arnold, Jack McKennes, and Eric "Snake" Gulliksen.

Singer-guitarist Bruce (who wrote *Can't Find the Time*) and Jack had previously comprised The Villagers, a popular Boston folk act. Snake was a founding member and guitarist for Worcester rockers The Blue Echoes.

I had not yet joined the band. A singer-songwriter on the burgeoning coffeehouse scene, I had returned that August to my native Worcester from San Francisco's Haight Ashbury, where I had spent the Summer of Love. I convinced my friends to move into the same neighborhood, which became known as Congress Alley. The community grew to include about 350 musicians, artists, poets, writers, and political activists. I wrote a song about it, oddly enough entitled *Congress Alley*, and started a band by the same name. Arnold, who lived on the Alley, took a liking to the song, and Orpheus added it to their repertoire.

A month after the Surf gig, the band landed a recording contract with New York producer/arranger Alan Lorber, who had also signed Ultimate Spinach and the Beacon Street Union (note: Beacon Street Union had actually signed with another

producer, Wes Farrell – ed.). Alan would package and promote all three groups as the “Bosstown sound.”

By November, Orpheus was in the studio. The first album, *Orpheus*, was released early in '68, and contained three of my compositions: *Congress Alley*, *Music Machine*, and *The Doorknob Song*.

Over the next two years, the boys toured with the likes of The Who, Janis Joplin, Cream, and Led Zeppelin (note: “shared the stage with” rather than “toured with” – ed.).

Can't Find the Time ultimately rose to number 80 on Billboard's national Top 100, made the Top 10 throughout the nation's Northeast quadrant and Ohio, and topped the charts at Number One in Boston, Worcester, Springfield, Providence, Hartford, and New Haven. It's been re-recorded several times, most notably by Rose Colored Glass, and by Hootie and the Blowfish, on the soundtrack of *Me, Myself and Irene*.

A number of artists, including doo-wop icon Lee Andrews (*Long Lonely Nights*) and Clean Living (*In Heaven There Is No Beer*), have released versions of *Congress Alley*.

The original Orpheus configuration went on to make two more albums and three more singles – including *Brown Arms* in Houston, which peaked at number 97 on the Top 100 list, and was number one in Hawaii – on the MGM label, and continued touring until December '69.

It was then that the group broke up, recalls Harry, after a “backstage meltdown.” He spent that winter “decompressing” in Morocco. In the ensuing years, he formed and performed with several Boston groups.

Eric walked away from the music business until '83, when he became a disc jockey. He worked as a supplier to the mining industry for 30 years, and holds 17 patents for mine-lighting applications.

Jack bought a home in the north woods of New Hampshire, where, until recently, he lived a Thoreau-like existence. He continued playing at ski lodges and other venues while running a successful candle business.

In 1970, Bruce and I shared lead vocals on a fourth Orpheus album, for which I wrote most of the material. Personnel included pianist Elliot Sherman, bassist Howard Hersh, harmonica virtuoso K.P. Burke, and legendary (having backed James Brown, Aretha Franklin, and many other stars) drummer Bernard “Pretty” Purdie. This reconstituted assembly appeared with B.B. King, Johnny and Edgar Winter, and the Tokens (*The Lion Sleeps Tonight*). The single, *Big Green Pearl*, made the Top 10 in Central and Western Massachusetts.

There have since been three Orpheus compilations released.

We broke up in '72. Bruce became a fundamentalist minister in Marin County, California. I returned to San Francisco, performing solo and with a succession of bands,

sharing the stage with Don McLean (*American Pie*), Arlo Guthrie (*Alice's Restaurant*), and The Tubes (*She's A Beauty*).

I moved to Hull in 1987. The music scene was still vibrant, and I performed at most of this town's musical hotspots, many of which no longer exist (The Atlantic Bar and Grill, The Box, the Old Nantasket Steamer).

February 2004. I received a call from Marshfield's Citizen of the Year, Roy Kirby, who had earned the accolade because of the central part he had played in creating the badly needed Uncle Bud's Skate Park in downtown Marshfield.

Roy, it turned out, was part owner of a hunting camp that abutted Jack's New Hampshire property. He had invited Jack to his award banquet at the Bridgeway Inn, hoping he would play a few tunes between sets. He asked me if I would help surprise my fellow alum by joining him on stage. I agreed.

The Bridgeway was packed with people who had come to honor Roy. The Tedd Walker Band turned in a solid first set. Jack, who was indeed surprised, and I did *Can't Find the Time*, and attempted to leave the stage. The audience, however, wouldn't permit it. Tedd graciously relinquished his second set, and we went on for another two hours.

The two of us landed a few more local gigs, culminating in a set at last year's Scituate Heritage Days Music Festival. We invited Harry and Snake to join us for a few tunes, and the four of us found ourselves together on stage for the first time in over 34 years. We were rewarded with a standing ovation.

We all enjoyed the experience so much that we decided to stay together, and have been rehearsing steadily ever since. We changed our name to Orpheus Reborn, because we've decided that we will not be just another “nostalgia” band. We've added much new material, and the oldies have been significantly retooled.

Our motto has become, “We are not your father's Orpheus.”

We've even added two new members – Bob Dunlap on lead guitar (something the original band never had), and Kathi Taylor on percussion.

“Boston Bob,” a South Boston native, has performed, recorded, and toured with Noel Redding, Bonnie Raitt, and Delaney Bramlett.

Kathi, who holds a degree in percussion from the prestigious Grove School of Music in Los Angeles, has toured internationally. Also adept at piano and guitar, her driving rhythms and complex electronic effects add a new dimension to our sound. Her clear alto voice allows us to feature lush, six-part harmonies (the original group boasted only three parts).

At 11:15 a.m. on Saturday, August 6, 364 days after last year's reunion, Orpheus Reborn will perform for the first time anywhere at this year's Heritage Days Music Festival.

The music will begin at 10 a.m., with Hull folksinger Mark Purcell and former Fat City pianist Joe Miccarelli. Following our set, '80s madcap rockers The Fools (*A Night for Beautiful Girls*) will perform, followed by Bellevue Cadillac and Room Full of Blues.

On Sunday, the music will continue with Flintlock Bluegrass Review; The Bruce Katz Band with guest vocalist Toni Lynn Washington; The Fat City Band; Moodring (with Lance and Larry Hoppen of Orleans (*Still the One*), Robbie Dupree (*Steal Away*), and An Lang, vocalist for Joe Cocker and Leon Russell; and Jefferson Starship.

We figure that the festival is the South Shore's best-kept secret. Where else can you find entertainment like this for free?

Orpheus Reborn will be appearing later in August with Barry Nolan on CN8's Nitebeat.

We're going for it. Maybe we'll make it again. Maybe we won't. All that really matters is, we're having a lot of fun. Hope you are too. ∞