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ORPHEUS REBORN

by Joe Coughlin

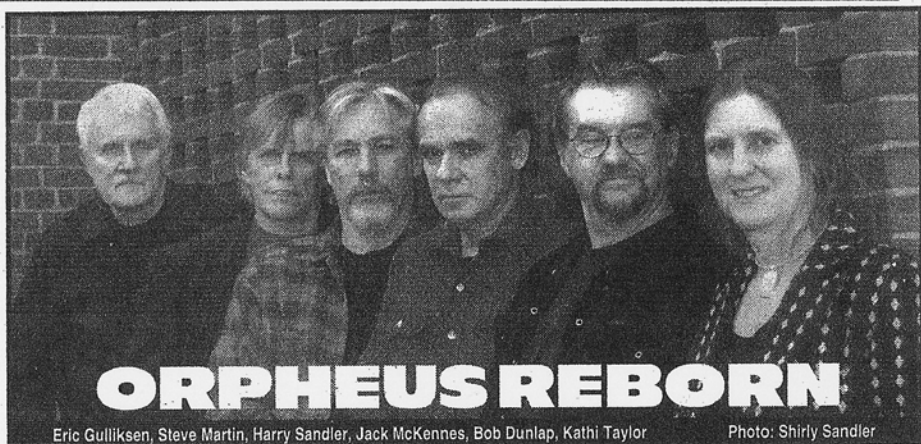
Aerosmith did it. The J. Geils Band did it. There are rumors that The Cars might do it, with a slight change of personnel. But just under the news radar (for the moment anyway) is the fact that the much-beloved Boston band Orpheus have done it. Reformed, that is. And in their case, are starting fresh as Orpheus Reborn.

Fairly amazing, when you consider the first version of the band hatched in 1967 and folded in '72. They released three albums and four singles for MGM, with all three LPs and two of the singles cracking Billboard's best-seller charts, with a fourth LP on Bell in 1971. Their second album, *Ascending*, reached #10 in *Playboy's* 1968 Jazz and Pop Poll for Vocal Album of the Year. They've shared stages with Jeff Beck, The Rascals, The Who, Cream, Led Zeppelin, and Janis Joplin just for starters. Their material has been reissued by three labels (one American, two European) as of this writing, in some cases with obvious respect and affection.

Often (and misleadingly) lumped into the "Bosstown Sound" marketing malarkey of the time, the seeds of the band actually sprouted in Worcester. Their music was (and is) NOT a pure product or indirect result of hippiedom, but largely came together from the folk-pop acts the members had been toiling in. Frequent orchestral arrangements also led them to be called baroque rock. For their era and amongst their peers, they were notably unafraid to write a pure, simple love song, devoid of politics or drama, that someone of any age could enjoy.

Their best-known tune, "Can't Find the Time To Tell You," has been covered by acts from around the world, from struggling bar bands to local comics (Red Peters of "Blow Me" semi-fame does a parody version) to million-selling artists (Hootie & The Blowfish's version was tapped for an appearance in the Farely Brothers' movie, *Me, Myself & Irene*, with that band actually doing the song surprising justice). Even one of the cover versions charted at no. 54 in the US. There are stations in this country whose playlists have included the original in their rotation for the entire 35 years since its release, an honor bestowed unto precious few acts in a given generation.

An unlikely mix of sheer coincidence and deliberate wrangling, too detailed for this space, has brought them together. And speaking of unlikely, where so many bands back then were just screwing around and happened to get discovered, Orpheus were holing up for months on end writing songs, determined to get signed. Now that so many acts reform strictly to cash in on old material,



ORPHEUS REBORN

Eric Gulliksen, Steve Martin, Harry Sandler, Jack McKennes, Bob Dunlap, Kathi Taylor

Photo: Shirley Sandler

Orpheus Reborn is doing the opposite again, retooling the old stuff so as not to blatantly milk the nostalgia factor, creating brand new material (a demo is already completed, another in the works), and following no set game plan beyond having fun with some friends and seeing where it takes them. The new lineup (four out of five original members, plus said friends) is:

Harry Sandler - drums and vocals
Eric Gulliksen - bass guitar and vocals
Steve Martin - guitar, harmonica and vocals
Jack McKennes - guitar and vocals
Kathi Taylor - percussion, drums and vocals
Bob Dunlap - lead guitar and vocals

I got to speak with Harry and Eric about just what the heck is going on here:

Noise: So basically, the time was right?

Harry: Yeah, I guess so. We're not trying in any way to be an oldies act. This is fun, getting back with people that we had such a great time with, and creating something new.

Eric: We decided that if we were really going to do this thing, we should do it right, and we added Bob and Kathi to take us away from being an oldies band. We wanted to do new arrangements with more of an edge. Bob's lead guitar gives us that edge, and when Kathi joined, she added all this percussion, and steel drums and things that you hear on that [demo] CD, and a sixth voice, so now we've got this huge capability, and it's really a trip.

Noise: Do you think that whole "Bosstown Sound" thing hurt or helped, or neither?

Harry: It helped us in some ways because it got us as a part of a half-million dollar marketing campaign. On the other hand, some of the other music didn't stand up, and so we got a negative attached to it.

Eric: If you check around the Web, there are some reviews and postings and so on about the Bosstown Sound that say it was really just a take off on San Francisco, right? But there are a couple of places where you'll see, "If there was a Bosstown Sound, it was Orpheus."

Noise: It seems like anything could happen now.

Harry: I guess that's how we all feel about this. We're guardedly optimistic, it's a fractured music world out there, and not the world we left in the early '70s. We're aware of that, we're aware of demographics, we're a lot smarter than we were back then, and we're trying to apply everything we've learned in the interim and keep ourselves centered, and the bottom line is, we're really just enjoying making good music. I hope that people like this music half as much as they liked [Orpheus back then], and I'll be happy.

Noise: Things ARE so fractured now that, some of the people who are gonna discover you, you might never have dreamed of.

Eric: That's probably true, and as you noticed on that CD, although the songs have a commonality, they're all very different from one another. We don't WANNA be the old "Sunshine Pop" band.

Noise: But it's still about the song, which is a nice change of pace from what's on the radio.

Harry: I think we all have high hopes that this project will move along, but we're also realistic.

Eric: I'm not. [laughter]

Harry: It's nice to be in a group where everybody's supportive and nurturing and encouraging of each other. At this point, there's way less of the problems many bands have had. We're seasoned. We're not a bunch of kids. It's approached with so much more of a clear head.

Eric: And we're all each others' biggest fans.

Noise: I gotta say, with that kinda downtime and a whole new angle, it's tough to come up with questions for you.

Harry: I think as time goes on, there'll be a different slant and directions.

Perhaps Sandler sums it up best in an interview from www.dirtywater.com: "I always said, it's not the person with the most things that in the end wins. It's the person with the best stories!" Orpheus Reborn plays Saturday August 6th as part of the Scituate Heritage Days Festival on Scituate Harbor.

www.orpheusreborn.com