

THE BIG TAKE- OVER

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INTERVIEWS

Wilco pt. 2
Low
Ani DiFranco
Mercury Rev
Rogue Wave
Doves
Ian Brown (Stone Roses)
Jimmy Eat World
Ash
(reunited) Raspberries
Suicide
Visqueen
Chris Stamey (dBs) pt. 2

SHORT TAKES

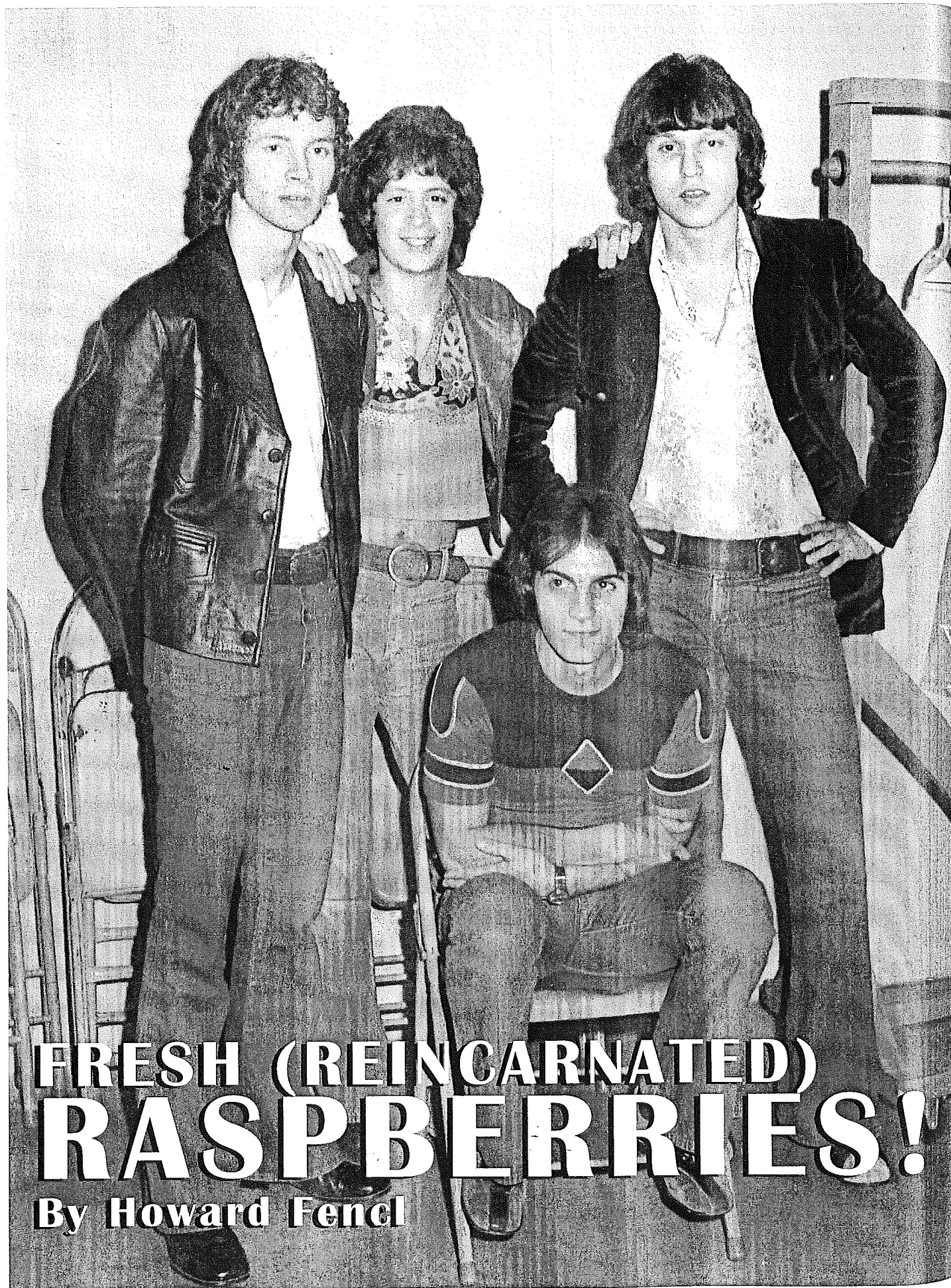
Neko Case
Damon and Naomi
Tortoise
The Dears
Eric Matthews
Outrageous Cherry
The Bravery
Television Personalities
Kaiser Chiefs
Sugarplastic
Wreckless Eric
Man Man
Joseph Arthur
Loose Salute

56

NEW YORK SENSATIONS

INTERPOL





FRESH (REINCARNATED) RASPBERRIES!

By Howard Fencel

AFTER THREE DECADES ON ICE, CLEVELAND'S RASPBERRIES ARE FINALLY TEARING IT UP AGAIN, REUNITED AND PLAYING OUT AT THE House of Blues (so far, two shows at the club in their hometown, and one in Chicago) with their to-die-for power-poppy swagger. The melt-in-your-mouth harmonies are impeccable. They're super-loud, and they simply rock. **WALLY BRYSON** bashes out tasty lick after lick. **ERIC CARMEN**'s impossible vocals hit hard, back off and caress, then jab throaty daggers and howl. **DAVE SMALLEY**'s singing bass lines nudge **JIM BONFANTI**'s Cro-Magnon drum assault into the band's melodic subtext.

Way back in the early 1970s, The Raspberries formed out of the ashes of other Cleveland bands, notably Bryson, Smalley, and Bonfanti's **THE CHOIR** (see their wonderful 1967 #68 hit and *Pebbles* and *Nuggets* staple, "It's Cold Outside," later covered by **STIV BATORS**), who amazingly shared stages with their idols **THE WHO**, **BYRDS**, and **YARDBIRDS**, plus Carmen and the post-Choir Bryson's **CYRUS ERIE**. They crafted three great LPs, 1972's *Raspberries*, 1972's *Fresh Raspberries*, and 1973's *Side 3*, all for Capitol, that laid the foundation for power pop. They toured ceaselessly. They made it to and sold out Carnegie Hall. The first LP was a 1972 Top 20 hit, thanks to its classic "Go All the Way," which went to #5 and sold 1.3 million copies. *Fresh*'s "I Wanna Be With You" similarly went to #16, "Let's Pretend" made #35 the next year, and two more singles from *Side 3*, "Tonight" and "I'm a Rocker" hit the Top 100. But they were young and impatient. Emotions burned, Smalley was fired, and Bonfanti quit in solidarity. Bryson and Carmen recorded a final LP (1974's *Starting Over*, also on Capitol, a *Rolling Stone* "album of the year," featuring their final hit, #18 "Overnight Sensation.") with **SCOTT MCCARL** and a third ex-Cyrus Erie, **MIKE MCBRIDE**. Google around a bit, and you can find the (first) end of the story, and get all the ugly play-by-play of Carmen and Bryson duking it out at the end (similar to the earlier end of Cyrus Erie), as the band slipped into oblivion and called it a day in April 1975. Carmen himself went on to have a successful solo career on Arista, Geffen, and RCA, with eight more Top 40 hits from 1976-1988 like the massive 1976's #2 "All By Myself" and #11 "Never Gonna Fall in Love Again"—which together fueled a gold LP in *Eric Carmen*. But the fans never forgot The Raspberries, and finally, though it took 32 years, the original classic lineup has now reformed.

Two months after lucking into the sold-out-in-15-minutes first reunion show in 2004 (see live section review), I find myself knocking on the 55-year-old Carmen's Cleveland-area door. (He's long since moved back from Los Angeles with his wife and children.) He answers it, and leads me into his home office. There's a keyboard, a fireplace with a roaring fire, and hanging gold and platinum records. The only full-band shot of The Raspberries is at Carnegie Hall. Bonfanti, 56, shows up toting a recent copy of *Big Takeover* to show Carmen, and the interview begins.

They finish each other's sentences and stammer about the band's future, talking in platitudes and generalities. No specifics. But they're not being coy: as the conversation unfolds, you become acutely aware of the fact they don't know *what* they'll do next, just that they'll do *something*. And that is miraculous. Because it simply means, that in the year 2005, incredibly, they are smack in the middle of being Raspberries again.

HF: Best to start with the burning question: How did it come about that the band reunited after 32 years?

JIM: This whole thing came about last June, 2004. My current band at the time, **BOXER** [see www.boxerrocks.com], did a show in Cleveland that was arranged by **ANTHONY NICOLAIDIS** from House of Blues Concerts. That was the first time I'd met Anthony. The Monday following that show he called me and proposed the idea of having Raspberries open the new House of Blues in Cleveland later in the year. My first reaction was not very positive but I thought this may be the last time we may have a good opportunity to reunite. I spent the next four to six weeks talking to all the band members and finally, around the end of July, 2004 we all committed to doing the show. Amazing.

HF: My editor wanted to know what it felt like, that first rehearsal or time together after more than 30 years? Was it euphoric, strange, exciting? My wife and I were lucky enough to be there standing in front of the stage, and I think about three songs in, some guy in front of us yells out, "What's it feel like?" And I think you or **WALLY** said, "It feels great." Did it?

JIM: It was all of that, euphoric, strange and exciting. I really was amazed it was happening and we had so much fun.

ERIC: It did. It did. The audience was just manic. And our families—my son [seven-years-old **CLAYTON**] had never seen what I do—well he saw me with **RINGO** [**STARR** and his **ALL-STAR BAND** in 2000] but he was only 2—for him to be in the audience and see what I do, that was pretty cool. And the audience—just so much loyalty. I could look out and see practically everyone on the floor mouthing the lyrics, and I was relieved, because they would help me with the words. And of course as soon as I thought of that, I blew the next lyric

HF: I'd like to focus mostly on what The Raspberries are doing now or might do in the future, rather than "what happened this week in 1972"-kind-of thing.

ERIC: I did one of those interviews last week for *Rollingstone.com*, and it was just like, "I don't want to dredge all that stuff up again." I mean, it's like 30 years ago. Not pertinent to this story.

JIM: It doesn't *matter* anymore. I had one before Chicago [the third House of Blues show, in January, 2005] like that. Gets old.

ERIC: And you know, at a certain point on these things, if someone catches me on *just* the wrong day [Jim laughs], I'm liable to say something like, "Well, you *never* know—Wally and I could go at it *any* time!" [both crack up, considering the way Raspberries ended.]

JIM: Yeah, could be *any* moment...

ERIC: You never know, it could just blow up and be a nightmare!

HF: Did either of you guys see [**PAUL**] **MCCARTNEY** last night do the Super Bowl halftime? [The Raspberries were known **BEATLES** fans.]

ERIC: He was just great, just great!

JIM: Yeah, I mean, I absolutely *love* his drummer. [*totally agreed!!!—ed.*]

HF: Who is that guy? [**ABE LABORIEL JR.**]

JIM: I don't know. [Eric starts searching the Internet] He's a really big guy and he plays some of the coolest drum fills. They're *very* tasteful. [*Yes, Yes, Yes!—ed.*]

ERIC: Well, Jim, you could do that too, if you like! One of the things I used to love about **JEFF PORCARO**, when I used to work with him,

is that in a fill, the last hit was *always* the kick drum. So it was like [air drums], "brumm-da-dum-dum da-dum, boom!" Very cool.

JIM: Paul's drummer just really sounds good. And I thought it was all very safe for the NFL after last year's nightmare!

ERIC: [finds it] Here it is, Abe Laboriel Jr.

HF: Well, there was no controversy over a "wardrobe incident." I'm surprised The Raspberries didn't stir up more controversy 30 years ago. I mean, you guys wrote some *super* horny songs! [Eric and Jim both laugh loudly].

ERIC: Uh, *some* of it!

HF: Why do you think *you* were able to get past censors—for instance, when you played the *MIKE DOUGLAS Show*—a ton of shows on TV. Songs like "Go All the Way." It doesn't take a great deal of imagination to know what you're talking about!

ERIC: Actually, half the people thought we sang "Please Go Away!" [laughter] The story I tell is that when I was writing the song, I was thinking about how **THE ROLLING STONES** had to change "Let's Spend the Night Together" to "Let's Spend Some Time Together" on the *ED SULLIVAN Show*. Then I'm listening to **BRIAN WILSON** on [BEACH BOYS 1966 masterpiece] *Pet Sounds* sing about things like living together [on 1966 #8 "Wouldn't it Be Nice"], and I'm thinking, "Now, why are The Beach Boys getting away with this content, and The Rolling Stones are not?" And I determined, it was maybe because The Beach Boys were sort of non-threatening, and they sounded like choirboys. So, part of genesis of the song "Go All the Way," was that I was walking through

play 'Red River Valley' on the 'E' string." But I was saying, "No, I want to play chords like **JOHN LENNON**!" I went home and canceled the guitar lessons. Years later, I ran into him, and he says "OK, so I was wrong!"

HF: How did you get the enormous drum sound that you got on "Tonight," [Bonfanti chuckles], and really on the *entire Side 3* album? If you listen to the way the drums sit in the mix on the first record [*Raspberries*], which I did on the way over here, as opposed to the way they sound on *Side 3*, they're *huge*.

JIM: It's a trick. You've got to have huge drums!

ERIC: There's a few other tricks as well!

JIM: We agree, *Side 3* sounds the closest to what the band was, of all the albums. We also think that it's too bad that it wasn't our *first* album, and then it went on from there! Over the course of the history of the band, I was constantly changing drum kits. I probably had 10 different Ludwig kits. I like the sound of big toms. So I ordered a special set of special sizes. They weren't oddball sizes, but it wasn't a kit that you opened up the Ludwig catalog at that time and it was the "Holiday Edition" or the "Combo Special," or whatever. I said, "I want these sizes. 14s, 16, 18, 24-inch bass, 6 Ω snare. I want them rack mounted." And I built the set. And I loved 'em! Big! That big fat wet-kinda tom sound!

ERIC: Um-hmm!

JIM: That, along with doing a better job recording too [out of side of mouth], from the *producer* side helped that! [Carmen laughs knowingly]. And that's the *same* kit I have now.

I had a guitar teacher who used to tell me, "You've got to play 'Red River Valley' on the 'E' string." But I was saying, "No, I want to play chords like JOHN LENNON!" I went home and canceled the guitar lessons. Years later, I ran into him, and he says "OK, so I was wrong!"

a drug store, and I used to peruse the book racks looking to get ideas for song titles, and I saw this book that had "Go All the Way" in the title and I thought, "This could be good!" But I thought it would have to be couched in a different context, so I decided when I was writing the lyric, to turn it around, and have the girl say it to the guy. I thought, "Maybe it'll work." It was pretty racy at the time, but because it sounded the way it did, no one was terribly incensed by it!

HF: Well then, what about [*Side 3's*] "Tonight," which is *also* super-horny?

ERIC: That *was* pretty straightforward! I wasn't trying to hide anything on that one! I guess I thought, "If we got away with that, we'll get away with this too!"

HF: I remember when my high school band learned "Tonight," there're chords in there I'd never heard in rock songs before—like a major seventh right in the opening riff, right?

ERIC: [running through the riff quickly on air guitar] Let me see... Yeah, there is! A lot of my songs have chords that are not in rock 'n' roll. Wally used to tell me all the time, "That's a *piano* chord! That's not a *guitar* chord!"

HF: The first time I recognized one in a rock song! My old guitar teacher taught me all those jazz chords, but until then, I never saw what I could use 'em for. He was teaching me crummy old standards.

ERIC: Like "Red River Valley?" [*the 1936 GENE AUTRY film/song—ed.*] I had a teacher who used to tell me, "You've got to

HF: Really? I had read somewhere that you sold your drums.

JIM: I did. I sold that drum set in 1977 because I wanted to quit music. I just felt like I needed to do that. So I did. I sold them to a friend of a friend. When I started to play again in 1992, and then Wally and Dave and I did a thing at the Odeon [small smoky rock club in the Cleveland Flats area] with **SCOTT MCCARL**, for some reason, I said to my wife, "You know, I'd like to get those drums back. For some reason, I think I should just have 'em back."

ERIC: Um-hmm. The planets lined up for the show.

JIM: She said "What are you going to do with two sets?" I said, "I don't know, I just feel like I should have 'em." So I set out to find this person. Well, the luckiest part is he still had them! 20 years later, he still had the drum set! He just *gave* them back to me [*nice guy—ed.*], and I refurbished them completely—bought all new stands, and recovered them and everything.

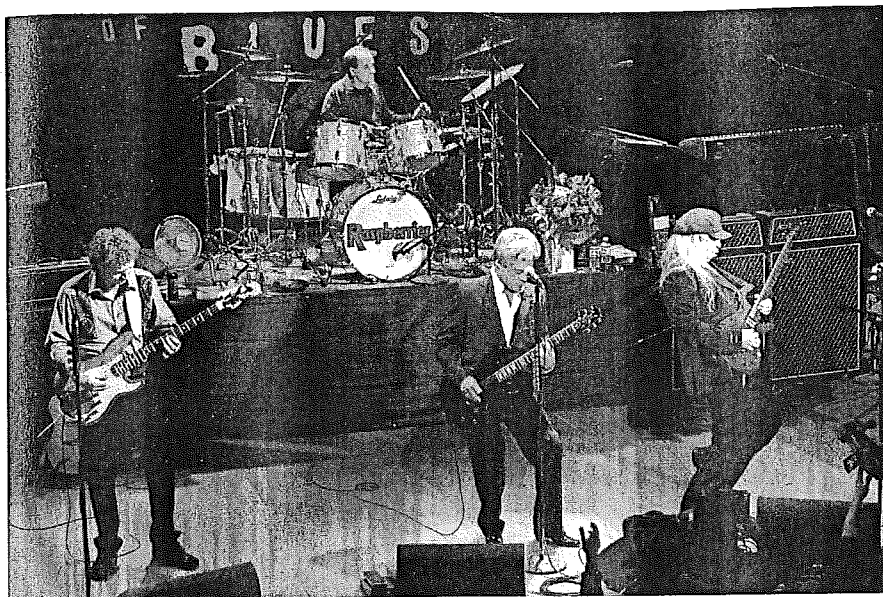
HF: That's just incredible.

JIM: Yeah! And I got him two tickets to the show! I called him up, his name is **SANDY**, and I said, "Sandy? I bought two tickets for you; I want you to come see them, and I want you to hear them." I won't let them go anymore, regardless.

HF: One more question about "Tonight." Who came up with the drum breakdown at the end? [Eric laughs with abandon.]

JIM: I don't actually remember!

ERIC: I stole it! From the end of "Tin Soldier" by **THE SMALL FACES**!



A friend of ours who was a rock writer told us once that he interviewed Chrissie Hynde. And he said to her, "What were you trying to do back then, when you first started out?" And she said, "Just be The Raspberries!"

JIM: Oh, that's right!

ERIC: But I think Jim did it better! You asked how you get the drum sound so big. Well another part of the equation is that, in addition to just having a great sound system there at the House of Blues, we were on such a budget-touring situation before ['70s], that at a certain point in time, our tour manager, **RUSTY PITRONE**, became our sound man. And Rusty rose to the occasion admirably, but it wasn't his vocation. He mixed our sound over the worst pieces of junk that just happened to be at some club, or whatever, wherever we played. Well, we're putting this [reunion] together, and I have a friend in New York whose opinion I trust very much, and he's a huge fan of the band, and has been for 30-odd years. He's a drummer himself who greatly admires Jim. And I e-mailed him one day, I thought, "Who am I gonna ask about this? What if I ask my friend **TOMMY ALLEN**. So I e-mailed him, and I said "If you could recommend the *best* sound guy to put together this House of Blues date, who would it be?" And I got an e-mail back that said, "My number one choice is **PETE KEPPLER**. He does **DAVID BOWIE**'s front-of-house mix, and on his off-days he works with **WILL LEE**'s band in New York. I e-mailed the guy and said "You interested? Here's the date!" And he e-mailed back and said, "Everything Tommy's hooked me up with has ended up being fun, I'm available." And I e-mailed Tommy back and said, "Do you think you can loan him your Raspberries records so he can catch up on what we're actually doing?" So Tommy gave Pete all of his Raspberries albums, and I sent him a makeshift song list. And he came to one rehearsal.

JIM: Yeah. But he didn't mix it.

ERIC: Right, he was just listening and making notes. And then we played that first House of Blues date—we did a sound check, and everybody came back and said, "Wow! This guy's good!" And then when we were doing the show in Chicago, Rusty, the guy who used to do our sound, comes up and he looks up to me and he goes [whispering] "This guy is unbelievable!" I was sittin' off to the side while Pete was working on Jim's drum set, and he kicked that bass drum, and it was just like, boo-o-o-o-om!!! His drums just sounded like *cannons*.

JIM: Yeah! He's good!

HF: So I got to the drum piece. Eric, how are you hitting all the notes?!

ERIC: [tongue-in-cheek] Well, the majority of them. The thing that works for me is, I sing best when my voice is just beat up. I learned to sing in smoky bars singing three, four sets a night. When my voice is hoarse and my vocal chords are swollen, that's

when it sounds good! [Jim agrees] And it's very controllable. When we used to record with The Raspberries, we'd go in, and for the first week or ten days, we'd just record the music. And then, they'd stick up a microphone for me, and I would start singing, and it was like **DONNY OSMOND**. I'm like, "What is this?!" And so I'd literally go out into the studio, and this started, I think, on the second album [*Fresh Raspberries*], and scream scales into a padded wall just before the session, just trying to rough my throat up. By the time it got to the fourth album [*Starting Over*], I actually had them set up a little booth out in the recording studio with a record player and a microphone and some headphones, and I would take the Small Faces and **THE WHO** and the Stones, and just sing along with those records for a couple hours before the session. Then before my first solo album [1975's *Eric Carmen*], I was sittin' there getting ready to sing, and once again I hadn't sung for two, three weeks, I said "Gawd! Wish I could figure out how to get this voice propped up without screaming into a wall for hours and hours!" And somebody said "smoke!" [all laugh loudly!] And it was at that moment that I started smoking! I went home, I remember, I was in a hotel, I bought a pack of Kools and a couple of cigars, went up in my hotel room, and I sat up that night, and I smoked. And I went in the studio the next day, and I did [1976 #2 hit blockbuster] "All By Myself," and it was like, "Hey! Hey!" Now unfortunately, you don't want to do that all the time. I *have* to have a couple days of rehearsal before the show just to blow it out. Just to get the voice into that spot. And I know what you're getting at, it turns out there are some songs I wrote in such *ridiculous* keys back in the '70s, that never should have been in that key to begin with. "Let's Pretend" comes to mind. And there are other songs like "I'm a Rocker" that we used to do toward the end of the show, and you realize at a certain point, "Well, that was in 'A,'" but by the time we *got* there every night, I was just str-u-g-g-l-ing. I'm screaming for an hour-and-a-half—so maybe it makes sense to drop this down to "G" and see what happens. And lo and behold, we drop it one key, and now it's like in my roundhouse! Two hours later and I can still bang that one out!

HF: The Northeast Ohio music scene is not very nurturing. Do you think it hurt you guys that you came from here?

ERIC: Yeah. Absolutely! I think that Cleveland has such a bad self-esteem problem. I don't know if that's from the '70s when the [Cuyahoga] river caught on fire, and [**JOHNNY**] **CARSON** was making Cleveland jokes all the time; I don't know what it is exactly. When **JOE BON JOVI** plays in New Jersey, or [**BRUCE**] **SPRINGSTEEN**, it's like, "He's one of our boys, yeah!" When you're from Cleveland and you come back to play, that doesn't happen.

It's a very odd thing. We were having hits all over the world. "Go All the Way" had been an international Top-5 record. We come back here, and people would say things like, "Well, you know, why would I go to Cleveland Music Hall and pay four bucks to see you when I used to see you for a buck at the Cleveland Agora?" [where they formally had played a regular Sunday night residency] In some ways, there was never as much support for the band here as there was in other cities. In New York, they totally got us. They understood. In England, they got it. In Japan, they got it. It's also partly, I think, because Cleveland isn't a big media center, Cleveland's not a hub. And the musicians go to L.A., and the musicians go to New York. I know when I toured with Ringo, we had been out for about two weeks, and some interviewer was talking to the band. And we had **JACK BRUCE** from **CREAM** on bass, **DAVE EDMUNDS** on guitar, **SIMON KIRKE** from **BAD COMPANY** on drums and Ringo, and **BILLY JOEL**'s sax player, and the guy went to each guy in the band and he goes, "Who's songs are the hardest?" And all at once, the entire band went, "*Eric's! By far!*" And when you think of Cream and Bad Company and whatever, you wouldn't think that the guy in The Raspberries' songs were the hardest to play. But these guys were all musicians, and they'll be the first to tell you.

HF: Well, there are all those major seventh chords in there!

ERIC: Either Dave or Jack said one day, as I was trying to teach them "Go All the Way," "There's a fucking chord for every word!" I never really thought about it, but, yeah there is! Dave Edmunds' songs are simple rock progressions, and Jack's songs are pretty much a riff, you know? If you can play [air guitar] "duh-duhh-duh-duh, duh-duh-duh, da-duhhh-da," you can play [Cream's 1968 #5] "Sunshine of Your Love." But my stuff, there are chord changes...

JIM: ...piano chords on guitar!

ERIC: Yeah, there's piano chords, there's key changes from the verse to the chorus and back. The Ringo band, they were having a rough time trying to sing the harmonies, and remember the chord changes! So, what were we talking about?

JIM: Ha! A senior moment!

ERIC: I just think Clevelanders think that if you're *from* here, that you just can't be any good. Because why would you *be* here? I think there's the perception that if you're still here, there must be something wrong with you. You're not good enough to go somewhere else. And that's a Cleveland problem.

HF: Well, you do have some very cool things going on now, like the **BLACK KEYS** from the Akron area, they're receiving accolades right now. And I don't know if you guys have heard of, and my son turned me on to, **THE SIX PARTS SEVEN**.

ERIC: Um-hmm!

HF: They're an instrumental guitar band. They're from Kent. There's a whole Kent scene going on again. If you play it back, you've got **NINE INCH NAILS**, **TRENT REZNOR** kind-of came from here, and he worked at Pi Electronics on Brookpark Road. Stuff like **THE PRETENDERS**—**CHRISSE HYNDE**'s brother [**TERRY**] is still working in bands out here [**15-60-75 THE NUMBERS BAND**]. [In the late '70s, Northeast Ohio also gave us Devo, Rocket From The Tombs, Pere Ubu, Dead Boys, Pagans, Electric Eels, Rubber City Rebels, Mirrors, Waitresses, Styrenes, Bizarros, Rachel Sweet, etc.—ed.]

ERIC: A friend of ours who was a rock writer told us once that he interviewed Chrissie Hynde. And he said to her, "What were you trying to do back then, when you first started out?" And she said, "Just be The Raspberries!"

HF: I want to ask each of you what legacy, what would each of you want to leave fans with 50 years from now.

ERIC: We'll be doing another reunion!

JIM: I think we've done that already. I think doing what we did in the last couple of months pretty much has set that legacy. For the

first time, I think, the people who have been at *those* shows have *really* heard the Raspberries. And other than at the very beginning, when we started, it was like the whole in-between wasn't *really* the Raspberries. But now, people are *finally* hearing the band. I think that in spite of all that has happened, we have made a mark in music that seems to be getting bigger all the time. And if we can keep our momentum going, this little momentum that we started, I think that we have a lot more to do. It seems like we're in the right spot for a lot of reasons. I mean, we talked about the state of music and stuff today—I think people are in search of something different now.

HF: Well, you guys actually perform. You actually get up there and sing.

ERIC: Sing and play, right!

JIM: Yeah, right, yeah!

HF: You guys are often credited with starting power pop!

ERIC: I think the legacy is the music. I think it's astonishing that 32 years after we played our last gig together, or made our last record, in the space of 15 minutes, people assembled from all over the world to hear this band based on the *promise*, pretty much, of what was on those records from 30+ years ago, and what they hoped we might sound like. The fact that, as time has gone on, that people like Springsteen, or **KURT COBAIN**, or **COURTNEY LOVE**, guys in **MOTLEY CRUE**, **KISS**, have *all* admitted to being Raspberries fans. Or being influenced by something we did. Years ago, I was first signing with Geffen Records, the head of A&R there said, "You know, **AXL ROSE** is a *huge* Raspberries fan." He goes, "*Yeah!* He likes the *Starting Over* album—he was into the *ballads!*" I said, "He's into the *ballads*?? This is the 'Welcome to the Jungle' guy, right??" You know, somebody sent me a tape of Guns 'n Roses in Japan, or somewhere, a live recording, where they had done this ballad from my first solo album called "Everything" live! I was dumbfounded! And I was reading this article about Motley Crue, and how they were formed, on a web site like, "The History of Motley Crue," and they were talking about how one of the first songs they ever recorded was "Tonight!" They were doing demos, and trying to get a record deal, and it showed up as a bonus on one of their recent re-releases. So there are these people... **KEVIN DUGAN**—one of our roadies, who has worked for **VAN HALEN** for the last 20 years—he called me and he says "You have no *idea* the influence you've had on the musicians I'm working with out here." He said "We would go out on the road with **POISON**, or whoever, and all they would want to know about was, 'Tell me Raspberries stories!'" So he said, "When you guys play here, I'll make some phone calls, and we'll have quite an assemblage of the rock elite to hear the band!" And I mean, that's the legacy!

HF: So you think there *will* be some more Raspberries.

ERIC: Yeah! We're talking about it now. And I have another friend, **TOMMY CONSOLO**, who I grew up with since the fourth grade, and he went off into the music business in a different avenue.

JIM: He left Cleveland. And now he's successful! [everyone hoots]

ERIC: And for the last six years he's been with **IRVING AZOFF**'s management company. He managed **SAMMY HAGAR**, who is now singing for Van Halen again, and they have a deal with Van Halen to do their tour, and one day, my friend, Tommy, and Kevin [Dugan] were talking, and Kevin said something about being from Cleveland. And Tom says "You know Eric Carmen?" And Kevin says, "Do I know Eric Carmen?! I was head of his road crew for years!" And they get talking, and they tell the stories, and Tommy sent Kevin back—when Kevin came in to do the rehearsals, he said "Tommy said to tell you, that if you guys want to go take this any further, please call him because he'll get you the best deal and whatever." Here, once again, it's nice to have someone that I know for my whole life in a management position, because first of all he

knows what he's doing, he's a *good* manager. And secondly, maybe this is a situation that can *help* us. So, we're going to talk to him, there have been other people that we have discussed things with—we have to really sit down and say "Now, where do we want to take this next?"

HF: I think there will be a lot of people happy to hear that you are taking this *someplace* next.

ERIC: Yeah! Yeah, I don't think we're done! We've worked too hard to get it up to here! Now the hard work is done!

JIM: Right. Now it's just a question of what to do. And we just want to do it right. [Eric leaves briefly.] We're trying to be careful, so we don't make some of the mistakes that we made before. And if we do it right, we can keep the momentum going, and we can continue to have successful shows. We're going to play again. We just want to be careful that we set it up right, 'cause we're having fun! [Eric's four-year-old daughter **KATHRYN LEE CARMEN** flits into the room in a yellow taffeta ballet tutu] Hello!

KATHRYN LEE: Hello, where's my daddy?


JIM: He went that-a-way! He's probably lookin' for you! And it's looking like it's probably going to be summer [2005]. Right now, in fact, I'm close to confirming a date in New York then at BB King's. It's sounding really good, and it's getting better. It's been a good thing. It's really been a good thing for us.

KATHRYN LEE: You're talking about my dad's concert.

HF: I *am* talking about his concert! What did *you* think of it?

KATHRYN LEE: I liked my daddy's concert. Because he sings good.

ERIC: [returning] Thank you, sweetie. [out of side of mouth:] I'll give you a quarter later! ☼



SMASH PALACE

over the top

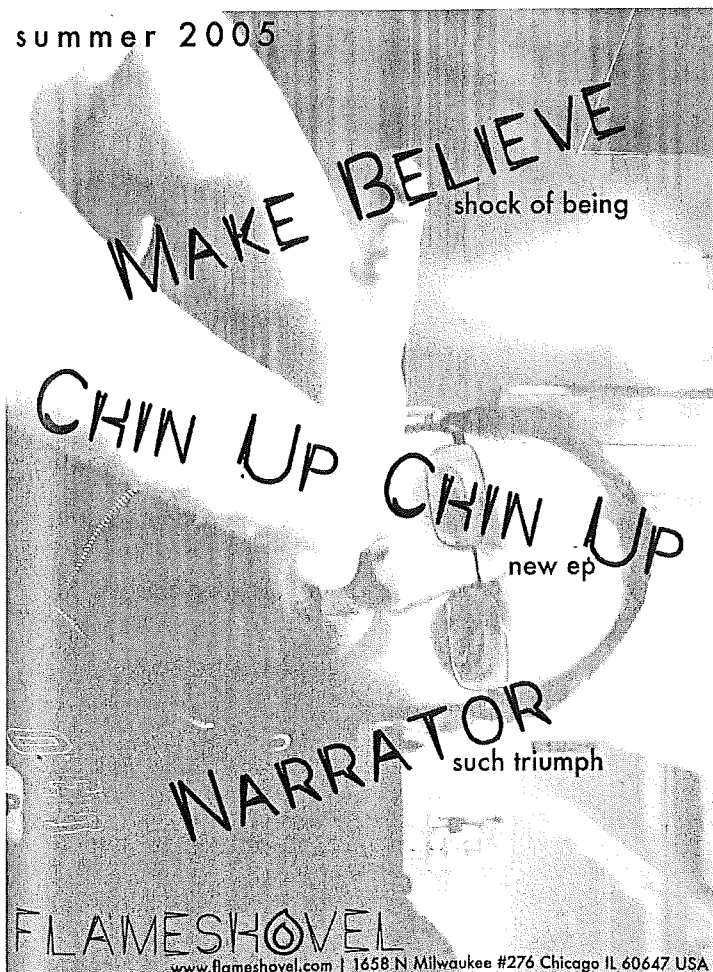
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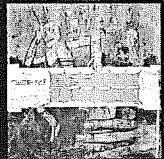
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tle. But our last time here a few years ago was more fun. I didn't mind the usual get-'em-in-and-out Preservation short set (about four long songs, 25 minutes), as the line formed down the street, but the half-dozen appeals for tips, delivered however jokingly, grew a bit tiresome. One request at the end obviously would have been sufficient to get the tourist crowd to fill the donation can: They loved the homespun collection of relaxed men who played with all the soul ground into their dilapidated drums, duct-taped piano, rusty banjo, ancient trumpet, banged-up trombone, and a tuba so dented it looked like it had fallen off the bus (I recognized it from last time). These late-middle-age mixed-race Southerners readily showed their spirit, talent, and empathy as they stomped out the lurching "St. James Infirmary Blues" and I, along with most of the crowd, found myself bumping and grinding like I was starring in my own burlesque show, my legs growing wobbly as I listened to the tale of a lover lying dead on a hospital slab—the ultimate blues. In the shack's darkness, I felt like I was outside on some bayou porch, and the alligators, frogs, and lizards had stopped to listen, too. It's hit-and-run Dixieland, short and cheap (\$6). Then, you go to the more modern Bourbon Maison to watch more of it, hit the streets, buy a new go-cup, watch the other tourists throw up, and marvel at how genuinely timeless the blues and Louis Armstrong-era jazz is when it's played for love by old guys who have it in their blood far more than do those who play any other form of music we know. The tourists get lucky.

→ THE RASPBERRIES

HOUSE OF BLUES, CLEVELAND, OH, NOVEMBER 26, 2004

(by **HOWARD D. FENCL**) **WALLY BRYSON's** jang-a-lang Rickenbacker 12-string announced the long-awaited return of power-pop icons The Raspberries after 31 years at Cleveland's new House of Blues. After four LPs, a Top 5 hit ("Go All the Way" in 1972) and chemistry that degenerated into fisticuffs, the 'berries were finally back, nailing every vocal harmony and every lick as if they'd never been gone. With 1200+ die-hard fans (some from as far away as Japan and England), the darkened HOB giant screen lit up with the words "They said it would never happen..." A brief video of **ERIC CARMEN**, Bryson, **JIM BONFANTI**, and **DAVE SMALL-LEY** from their heyday set the scene. When the soundtrack music gave way to "I Wanna Be With You," the screen lifted, the curtain parted and after three decades, there were The Raspberries in mid-song. The band ripped through two-and-a-half hours of power-pop gems from their catalog, including "Let's Pretend," "Overnight Sensation," "Ecstasy," and "Making it Easy." With a nod to their band before Carmen joined (**THE CHOIR**), they bounced through "It's Cold Outside." Surprise **BEATLES** covers ("Baby's in Black," "No Reply") impeccably channeled **LENNON** and **MCCARTNEY**. Bassist Smalley was also in good voice and great spirits, and sported a spanking new hot-rod blue Rickenbacker bass the band had apparently given him some good-humored grief over. Bonfanti's drum work pounded it all together; he didn't sing, but got on mic quipping that the band was thinking of calling itself the "Elderberries" now. There's talk of a nationwide HOB tour. Watch for it at www.raspberries.net, and don't miss it if it happens.

→ ROGUE WAVE

SOUND FIX RECORD STORE, WILLIAMSBURG, BROOKLYN, FEBRUARY 5; MERCURY LOUNGE, FEBRUARY 7

These were two *very* different shows. In the pleasant café adjoining Sound Fix, Oakland's Rogue Wave played at about a fifth of their normal volume. This was actually the better of the two performances; given that about half their sole album, *Out of the Shadows*, is made up of quieter, often drums-less tunes (it was recorded when the group was just **ZACH ROGUE**, not the quartet they are today), such songs as "Falcon Settles Me" and the opening "Kicking the Heart Out" emphasized Rogue's affable, unaffected, guy-next-door, vaguely folk underpinnings. Meanwhile, the MTV *Unplugged*-style setup transformed the louder stuff like

"Endless Shovel" and "Every Moment" by illuminating their pure melodies. Indeed, the coffeehouse/living room atmosphere lent a homey, folksy, casual air to an agreeable winter Saturday afternoon in otherwise hipster-central Williamsburg, and the relaxed audience, parked on sofas and lounge chairs and sipping hot drinks, loved it. It proved a good setting for the band to debut a whole 'nother LP's worth of material as well—and it's a fantastic record store, too!

The performance two nights later at the Mercury was the diametrical opposite. The live band turned out to be heavier than the more solo album, with white afro-ed drummer **PAT SPURGEON** leading a more rock-based charge, while hippieish, bearded guitarist **GRAM LEBRON** chipped in with a dozen strong lead parts. (Interestingly, these two changed places for four or five songs and nothing was lost, a trick that Sebadoh, for instance, never pulled off so well!) Although the louder Rogue Wave slightly obscured Rogue's zesty voice (which could be heard so clearly at Sound Fix) and altered some of *Shadows'* immediate charms, their greater heft added excitement to rockier numbers such as the La's-like "Seasick on Land" and especially the psychedelic Brydsonian "Sewn Up," contrasting nicely with the folkier material like "Postage Stamp World." In the end, I was sorry only that I'd missed the other two Mercury and Maxwells gigs on this four-day New York swing. Whether loudly or softly rendered, this is exquisite new pop in all its best facets.

→ THE STANDS

SOUTHPAW, PARK SLOPE, BROOKLYN, MARCH 2

In front of a two-thirds empty Southpaw on a frigid Wednesday, this black-clad Liverpool quartet bore little resemblance to the spry LP that had drawn fans to fill the other third of the club. Granted, their "new" LP, just released here, is a year old (*All Years Leaving*, our #24 pick on import in BT 54), and back home they're about to release a second one, but still, this was a *very* different animal, one that played only five or six songs in a 45-minute set. They stretched two rather simple four-minute songs past the 10-minute mark with repetitive, mid-volume building to blasting level psychedelia, fed by endless two-guitar leads from leader **HOWIE PAYNE** and **LUKE THOMPSON** and a rhythm section that wouldn't quit. They're actually quite good at this; at one point near the end, during the scorching lead break of the closing "The Way She Does," both guitarists began stabbing and hitting the notes so manically that the group shed its overwhelming allegiance to all things Dylan, Bryds, Beatles, and Buffalo Springfield and morphed into The MC5! In line with their heroes' and their own highly developed melodic sense, the pair's harmonies remain their major strength. While playing, the affable Payne was smiling (that's always welcome) when he wasn't going crazy a la Weller, Townshend, or Wayne Kramer, and between songs he was gracious, assuring the audience that it was a "pleasure" to finally be in America and kicking out the jams. (That's all I could make out; Payne speaks in a garbled Scouse accent that makes fellow Liverpoolian mumbler Ian McCulloch sound like Henry Higgins.) Nonetheless, in 2005, it's odd to watch a frontman strap on a harmonica and then sing in an exaggerated Dylan whine. What is this, *Don't Look Back II*? In the end, I was torn. On the one hand, it was a kicking, storming performance by a seriously talented, dynamic band that generated moments of sheer electricity. On the other hand, they seem a too-nostalgic group of traditionalists who, paradoxically, pay little heed to the carefully crafted music they release. Gonzo *Nuggets* or folk-pop heroes—will the real Stands please "stand" up?

→ TRASH CAN SINATRAS

FEZ, DECEMBER 4, 2004

It seems odd to review a show that the band has already released a live LP of, only three months later (coincidentally immortalizing the just-closed Fez, the red-curtained, intimate, trashy-elegant cabaret it took place at, in a series of photos in the inner sleeve—