

BILLY SULLIVAN



By Helen Marktetti

Cleveland native, Billy Sullivan has been part of the music scene for over thirty years, which started while he was in his teens. "I am the youngest of six and the music from the 60s was the sound track to our lives," he said. "I was raised on that

music. My mom was somewhat of a bluegrass musician but never pursued it professionally although she should have because she was good enough. We listened to all the British Invasion bands, too. There was quite a musical palette to choose from in our house."

Billy started out playing drums before switching to guitar. "I did play drums in school," he said. "My brother was a drummer in a band as well but sold the drum set when he went into the Navy. If he had not sold the drum set then I probably would have still played the drums. I mainly play guitar now." Billy remembers the first song he learned to play on the guitar, which was, The Little Black Egg.

As a teenager, Billy already knew that a career in music was his calling, "I remember looking at record jackets of different bands and knew in my heart that this is what I wanted to do with my life," he recalls. "I started playing in nightclubs when I was about 13 years old. I had very understanding

parents and they came with me, of course. Back then, either you played in a garage band or you played sports. Rock and Roll bands and club bands were thriving in those days and I wanted desperately to be part of that."

Billy has quite an extensive rock and roll resume that began with playing in The Paul Pope Band. "I remember going to concerts and hoping that someday I would be the one onstage," he remembers. "Playing with The Paul Pope Band was the start of the reality I had wanted. Paul had a huge following and we were able to play concert venues and open for national acts. I remember the first famous band we opened for was Triumph. It was June of 1979 and the concert was in Buffalo, New York. In my opinion, I had made the big time. I had arrived! There was a fan base for us in Buffalo, too. I remember hearing that the bass player for The Goo Goo Dolls (Robby Takac) would come and see us since he lived in Buffalo."

Traveling to Buffalo in those early days was made possible when everyone chipped in to buy a Winnebago. "It was a four-way split to purchase it," said Billy. "Each of us lived in a different part of the Cleveland-Akron area so we would meet up then hit the road. When we had outdoor venue gigs, we actually lived in it. We did that nearly every week from June 1979 until late 1981."

Billy continues, "The whole reason why I got into this business was so that I could be in a rock and roll band. Things evolve and change as time passes. I did have a song that was popular locally and did receive some national airplay, Never Again (Without You) in 1986, which was co-written with Walt Nims who also wrote Precious and Few. I started to see however that things weren't quite working out as I had hoped. After I moved passed that, I met up with Gary Lewis who was actually living in Cleveland at the time. The guys from the 60s bands circuit were just starting to do reunion



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tours again. We all know that rock and roll is very youth-oriented and I was already in my mid-twenties then. I was very happy being the sideman. In my mind, I had made the decision that it was better for me to do that. I'm a good guy to have in your band." (laughs)

Billy has no regrets with his decision. "I'm very happy being the guy in the back. I knew I would still be working as a side guy when I got older. Whenever I come back home to Cleveland to do some of my solo performances, it gives me an opportunity to show my work but I'm happy doing what I am doing. Starting out with Gary Lewis and The

focused on the 70s groups instead of the 60s groups. For 60s groups, Peter Noone is probably at the top of the heap for the 60s circuit."

What does it feel like to play with one of the 60s British Invasion classics? "I'm glad to be part of it," said Billy. "I grew up with these records but at the same time it's my job and I have to play the professional role."

Even though he lives in Chicago, Billy still returns to Cleveland as often as possible. "I'm proud to be part of the music scene here. Cleveland will always be home no matter where I am." Speaking of Cleveland, we have heard many times over the years the jingle for the IX Center Indoor Amusement Park on which Billy is doing the familiar vocals. "George Sipl wrote the jingle," explains Billy. "It was back in 1993 when he asked me if I would sing it. Jingles usually run their course but this has hung on for all these years so if that's my legacy in Cleveland, then so be it!"

When time permits, Billy does solo shows at various venues, assisted living and nursing home facilities. "I love doing those kinds of shows, too. I gear the music toward the 50s. It seems to make the residents day and I enjoy seeing that. Now that I live in Chicago, I am trying to get out there and do the same thing. I also play in a Chicago area band called, Acoustic Avenue. I do gigs as well with Jimmy Sohns who had the hit, Gloria with his band, Shadows of Knight. I am still staying true to myself and what I mean by that is I have no desire to learn music by Lady Gaga or Britney Spears just to keep up to date with who or what is popular at the moment because that's not me."

For more information about Billy Sullivan including show dates that include solo gigs, Herman's Hermits performances and other projects, please visit: www.billysullivan.com Billy Sullivan is also on Facebook.



Playboys gave me the opportunity to do what I love doing and continue to play with some incredible acts. I was with Gary for 23 years. We were on many reunion tours so you're always meeting people and interacting."

Eventually the schedule for Gary Lewis was not as full. "His schedule became thinner of his choosing and as a side man, it does depend on the quantity of work that you get," said Billy. "You don't share in any royalties or merchandise sales with an artist and I wanted to keep playing. Around that time is when Rich Spina was telling me that Peter Noone was looking for another guitar player. Peter contacted me and asked me to play for him to keep with the original Herman's Hermits band tradition of having two guitar players. He understood that I needed to finish my show dates with Gary and suggested I play for him when those dates were done. I didn't want to leave Gary in a bad way. It is a business but you also establish friendships, too. I was Gary's drummer for the last five years that I was with him. Times change and music changes right along with it. Nostalgic groups now are more



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