



It Happened Then and Now

Local Comp Re-Release Gets Notice

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Staff Writer

Thirty years ago, when some of us were much younger and some of us weren't even sperm, the state of music was a dusty and primordial place. If we couldn't worship at the feet of some touring, uber-human Rock Gods in a live and massive venue, we could turn on the radio and listen to their tunes. Through the speakers we could hear these dinosaurs of rock and their fat and bloated anthems; stale and prehistoric, wallowing around in the stereo tar pits of self-absorption, great drugs and masturbatory guitar solos. And if you had any musical chops and pursued a direction toward... gasp!... a band, you were told to either forget it and stop dreaming, or to cover the hits of all the on-air, bloated rock bands and their sound-alike offspring. It was pretty barren.

"There was nothing going on," Craig Bell, head honcho behind **Gustav Records** plainly states. "There was your basic bar band scene at the places around town. They were doing your cover band thing and there was seriously, there was nothing going on at all."

Bell would know if there was nothing going on in town. He had just relocated from Cleveland via a job with the railroad. While in Cleveland, he played bass in a band called **Rocket From The Tombs**, which existed for a couple of years with Bell carrying the bottom end for about six of those months. Rocket played an aggressive "I ain't heard that before" style of music that is heralded these days by fans and music hacks alike as one of the early, Stoooge-inspired, primitive punk bands. (Upon disbanding, Rocket branched into melodic-noise punks **Pere Ubu** and snot rocket punks **The Dead Boys**). Having been part of something that was relatively, if not known at the time, as groundbreaking, and dropping into the middle of a musical desert could be deadly. But even in the desert there is water.

"I did this one-off recording with this guitar guy **Terry Smith**. He had a band that he was in called **Raw**

Power who eventually morphed into **No Music**. Through them, I heard about a gig they had down in Bridgeport at the old **Hotel George** or the **Snake Pit**."

After seeing Raw Power and other Stooges-rock and early punk inspired local bands **Epitome** and **The Survivors**, Bell knew that he had to start something.

Finding like minds in folks who worked the singles section at **Cutler's Records** in New Haven and networking around, Bell started **The Saucers** in 1978.

"We had a rehearsal space down on the corner of Crown and Orange street. And one night **Tom Hearn** (currently in **Big Fat Combo**) and **Tom Andrukevich** (then of the **Stratford Survivors**) just walked in and asked who we were."

Through that "who the hell are you?" meeting, Bell was introduced to a bunch of bands that were just flying under the radar; bands that came to light and were rec-

photo by Ernst

ognized as more places to play sprouted up. The catalyst to that growth spurt was **Ron's Place** (now a Thai restaurant) on the corner of Park and Chapel streets. A local dive frequented by street folks and trannies, it had an ideal environment for something new and original.

"I remember going in there just to use the phone," laughs Bell. "It was really bad and I thought, 'Man! This place would be perfect to have bands!'"

With a home base/club house, situations began breeding like Biblical families. Bands begat bands. Band members drifted between bands. Ron's Place slowly faded and begat the scene to search and discover **Brothers II** in West Haven. Brothers begat **The Grotto**. Soon enough the whole scene perked up and bands were crawling through clubs all over the area. And the clubs were seeing the financial benefit of this so they started having more original band nights. And with all that growth and begattin' going on, that commotion begat Gustav Records.

"Myself and **Bill Murphy** (then of **The Bats**) put Gustav together," remembers Bell, "because he wanted to put out a Bats single and we were looking to put out a Saucers single and the **Poodle Boys** wanted to do one as well."

Between 1980 and 1982 there were three singles put out on Gustav and one full-length album. Then, in 1982, with all the activity still happening, Bell had an idea.

"I wanted to somehow, I don't know, document all the bands that we knew that were out there that were really amazing."

That's how the compilation **It Happened But Nobody Noticed**

came to light. Featuring a baker's dozen of local bands, each contributing a song, the comp showed the great diversity of the area music scene. From the street assaultive No Music to angular pop-wave of **The Furors**, from the arty **Troupe Di Coupe** to the straight-up pop of **The Bats**, from the new wave **International Q** to the somber-wave **October Days**, many faces of the multifaceted scene were buffed and polished in a gem of a record that captured the diversity of this new thing.

But like mushrooms after a solid rain, that scene sprouted up from a

big pile of nothing seemingly almost immediately and then it kind of slowly faded away; as did Gustav Records. The comp was released, after some delays, at the tail-end of that hyperactive spurt of scene growth.

"Maybe just a little bit too late," Bell laughs.

Putting out one last Gustav release (by Bells then-latest project **The Plan**), there were to be no more records put out on the little New Haven-based label... until nearly 30 years later. And, like mushrooms after a solid rain, some things just are known to pop back up out of seemingly nowhere when you least expect it.

Bell recalls: "I was in the area for last year's **Daffodil Festival** and I was bumping into a lot of people I knew. And almost all of them were asking me, 'Hey Craig, How come that record, the **It Happened...** comp never came out on a cd? And I thought to myself, 'Well, I dunno. Maybe because nobody seemed to like it then.' And then those people would say, 'Aw man. I've worn out the grooves on that record.' And everyone was saying how great a record it was. That made me say, 'Heh. Wow.' So, I guess it had an impact which is cool. It just took a while to come around."

Having a few dozen people point their fingers in a direction is cause for a body to look that way. And Bell went in that direction and started putting together a cd reissue of that great local comp from "way back when." He also went one step further.

Remembering the sizeable chunk of truly killer bands at that time, Bell started hitting up old band cronies and asking them for contacts and master tapes, hoping to tack on a couple extra tracks of tunes not found on the original pressing. When he finished hunting and foraging, Bell found he had enough songs to fill another disc.

"I couldn't cut any of 'em," he says from his home in Indiana. "So I said, 'Well... I got a double cd.'"

It Happened But Nobody Noticed is out, rereleased to please and soothe the reminiscent ears of those that may partially remember those times. And to let a new mass of ears listen to the past. It's now a two-disc audio history lesson; musical times on tape; a little aural peek into a time frame when shit was happening for what was or at least felt like, the first time. From nothing comes something... and that something comes back again.

If You Go....

CD Release Show For 'It Happened But Nobody Noticed'

The Saucers, Stratford
Survivors, Poodle Boys,
Hot Bodies, The
Excerpts, The Furors,
Dada Banks and more.
Friday, April 25
8:00 p.m. (arrive early)
Café 9,
250 State Street
New Haven;
203-789-8281