



Missing Persons (clockwise from top): Chuck Wild, Warren Cuccurullo, Terry Bozzio, Dale Bozzio, Patrick O'Hearn.

BY BILL BRAUNSTEIN

AS THE CAR taking Dale and Terry Bozzio to their sound check passes through the cactus-sprinkled Phoenix, Arizona parking lot and rolls by the giant marquee, the driver slows down just enough to let them take it in. "You know," says Dale, the tiny blonde siren lead singer, to her husband, drummer Terry, "Missing Persons' looks good in big letters."

The genuine awe registered in her voice is just one indication that the success the group is experiencing hasn't really had time to sink in. After all, their first album, on Capitol Records, *Spring Session M* (an anagram for Missing Persons) has only been out two weeks. But Missing Persons, a Los Angeles-based band that has managed to wrap a catchy hi-tech pop sound around non-threatening songs that deal with everyday prob-

lems and fears, has already enjoyed some modest triumphs.

A few of the group's early songs like "I Like Boys" and "Mental Hopscootch" have given them a strong following in their home town. And an EP they released earlier this year managed to get national airplay and produced a hit single, "Words," that broke into the top 40 last July. Now, with the album moving up the charts, along with their newest single, "Destination Unknown," Missing Persons hopes that this tour will make them known.

"We are trying to do songs that everyone can relate to," says the band's leader and driving force, Terry Bozzio, a veteran of three years service with Frank Zappa's band (which he left in 1978). Bozzio formed Missing Persons with other Zappa alumni, including his wife Dale, guitarist Warren Cuccurullo,

bassist Patrick O'Hearn and keyboardist Chuck Wild. "The music is modern. It's electronic. It's played by good musicians. And it breaks new ground because they're not your typical pop songs — it's very accessible. We don't want to alienate people. We want to make friends."

Central to the band's appeal is Dale Bozzio, a former *Playboy* bunny from Boston who has been a model, actress and artist; she provides the band with its visual fireworks and an engaging, distinctive singing style that is punctuated by occasional high-pitched yips. ("It really is an odd tone that is a natural thing that I do that seems right for certain words and certain songs and I've just tried to procure it as such and as to my own curiosity, it's been something that people have noted on as an odd thing that I do," she says in her own inimitable syntax.) A five-foot-one, 88-pound blonde with feathery red and green-streaked hair, Dale also designs her own clothes, sometimes on the spur of the moment. She has worn everything on stage from a skirt made of old 45s to a brassiere made of halved coconuts.

The story of the group forming starts in Boston in 1974 when Dale met Zappa after one of his shows. A few years later, after she had quit her job as a *Playboy* bunny, she left Boston and came west to Los Angeles. She stumbled onto a Zappa rehearsal session in 1976 and it was there that she met Terry.

"It was love at first sight, unfortunately," Dale says. Unfortunately? "Yes, because it gets so serious at times you wonder how you can put up with it all." Three years later they were married.

In the meantime, Terry, after playing with Zappa for about three years, recording eight albums and touring the world four times, started to get

itchy feet. He felt there was more he could do. "I really wanted to write my own music," he says, "and I got frustrated at not being able to do that. Finally in 1978, I wasn't showing the same enthusiasm I had shown earlier, and Zappa said, 'I think it's time for you to leave the band and pursue what it is you want to pursue.' So I left, on good terms, to try new things."

After a stint with a band called Group 87, where he played with Patrick, Terry was invited to join the British progressive rock group U.K., where he stayed for about six months. In the meantime, an old acquaintance, Warren Cuccurullo, had joined Zappa's band as a guitarist. Dale, too, worked with the Zappa band. He had encouraged her to try singing and she does vocals on his *Joe's Garage* albums and the single "I Don't Wanna Get Drafted." A friendship with Warren blossomed, and the two started writing songs together while Terry was on tour.

"Together they wrote the beginnings of what was eventually to become 'I Like Boys' and they brought a tape of it to me while I was touring," says Terry. "When I heard it, I thought, this is incredible. I'm quitting this band and we are going to form our own."

Terry persuaded Patrick to play bass and eventually the four made a rough cassette that they took to veteran producer Ken Scott, a man who had produced such acts as David Bowie, Supertramp, George Harrison and Devo.

Scott liked what he heard and helped the band make a real demo tape that was shopped around to record companies. "We figured with all our past experience, we'd have a record deal in about two weeks," remembered Terry. "Little did we know... No one wanted us."

Undaunted by their lack of success

at getting a record deal, and confident the material they had was hit potential, the band decided to cut a seven-inch EP. They borrowed money, did their own art work, the promotion, the advertising, distribution and the actual selling. They took it to radio stations, seeking airplay. Amazingly enough, many deejays did play the record, but still, no label deal. "That was our incubator period," says Dale.

With the added income from the EP, the group was able to hire keyboard player Chuck Wild. Dale was starting to come into her own as a performer, adding visual spice with her off-the-wall costumes that she created out of burlap, airline tubing, plant pots, leather or beads.

"All this stuff had a wonderful effect on people," says Terry. "They kept coming to see our shows to see what we would do next. We would change from show to show, the same way a big rock group would change from tour to tour." When the band, which was still unsigned, sold out the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, a 4,000-seat venue, record companies could no longer ignore them.

Capitol signed Missing Persons, put out a slightly different version of the EP on a 12-inch disc, and it ended up selling more than 220,000 copies, making it the largest-selling debut EP in recording history (or so claims Terry). "And that," says Terry, "is the point of the whole story. Nothing on that tape was changed, production-wise. It was the same tape that all the record companies passed on. The same tape they said would never get airplay."

"I think the album is solid," Dale adds, "and we're the type of band that are really true to life, as well as the material being genuine, it delivers on stage as well. It suffices the means."

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