

Do you remember Whizkey Stik?

Astoria hard rock band finds new fans nearly four decades later

By ANDREW TONRY

The rediscovery of seemingly long-lost music is becoming increasingly common in the internet age.

Most celebrated, perhaps, is the saga of Rodriguez. The Detroit musician's albums, first released in the 1970s, gained near legendary acclaim in South Africa without his knowing. Obscured by derelict management, fans abroad thought Rodriguez was dead. He was, in fact, working construction, having long since left the music industry. The reconnection of Rodriguez to that audience is chronicled in the Academy Award-winning documentary "Searching for Sugarman." New fans — many yet to be born at the time of the record's re-release — quickly followed.

While less epic in scale, a similar story has roots Astoria. And though they never developed legions of fans, the members of Whizkey Stik are edified just the same.

"After 36 years I'm finally getting my album made," chuckles Carl McLaughlin, Whizkey Stik's singer, guitarist and principal songwriter.

It wasn't for lack of interest. The progressive, arching, hard rock foursome — which included Mark Bugas on bass, John Police on drums and Terry Duoos on Hammond organ — sniffed success. In 1980 they signed a management deal and flirted with executives from Arista Records. As a newspaper headline from a 1980 Seaside Signal reads: "local boys close to making good."

Whizkey Stik began in the mid-'70s. The group began playing exclusively covers, performing at high schools, Christmas parties and so on.

"After a couple of years we were like: 'We aren't going to get anywhere if we don't start doing original music,'" McLaughlin says. "I had all these song ideas, and we said, 'Let's do it!'"

Taking a hiatus from performing live, the group decamped to their rehearsal space — a large outbuilding atop the hill at 520 40th St. The front was occupied by Duoos' family's construction business. In the back, the band went to work, writing and recording with reel-to-reel tape machines. From those sessions, Whizkey Stik sent a song to Portland radio station KGON, which featured the band on a compilation album. Shortly after, the band was included in another compilation, of the burgeoning heavy metal genre.

Whizkey Stik's contributions to those collections, presumably, are what caught the ear of some totemic music executives.

"After those two (compilations) somehow, Clive Davis, he had heard about us and he requested a demo tape," says McLaughlin. "That never happens. Ever." The band obliged, and the tape found its way to John David Kalodner, another storied A&R exec, who sent manager Butch Stone to see Whizkey Stik perform. At the time, though, the band had hardly any local following.

"In Astoria we felt like outsiders," McLaughlin says. There wasn't much



In 1980, Astoria hard rock band Whizkey Stik featured, from left, Terry Duoos, Carl McLaughlin, Mark Bugas and John Police. Over 30 years later, the group is finally putting out a record.

of a music scene at the time, he adds, and no one was doing what they were — a Deep Purple-inspired fusion of psychedelic and progressive rock plus the serrated guitars that presaged heavy metal, and the soaring, melodic vocals of hair metal. When the group did play, locally, they experienced fissures with the jukebox.

"Disco was all the rage," McLaughlin remembers. "We'd get off the stage, and the jukebox would kick on and it'd be disco. It was like, how do you transition? It's hard to compete. People like to dance. I just felt out of place." So, for the showcase with Kalodner, the band would perform in its practice space.

"They flew to Oregon and we met 'em at the airport and we drove all the way to Astoria and we auditioned for them," McLaughlin says. "It went really well. It went by really fast. We played nine original songs."

"There wasn't a whole bunch of talk," McLaughlin adds. "(Stone) was a pretty quiet guy. We ended up signing a management contract."

But, instead of some high-profile gigs, a tour or time in professional studio, Whizkey Stik received mostly silence. As McLaughlin tells it, Stone was more interested in him and drummer John Police than Whizkey Stik at large.

He wanted to use them for other projects. Having spent his formative musical development with the band, McLaughlin was upset by the suggestion.

As the management contract bore no fruit, the band eventually wriggled free of it. But soon after, life got in the way.

"Very, very quickly, we were all married," McLaughlin says. "And by '83 all but one of us had a kid. There's this conceit that we had almost made it and then naturally falling into the lifecycle of the married person and having children and all the responsibilities."

Though the members continued to convene a few times a year, just to jam and have fun, the ambition dried up. In a sense, Whizkey Stik was gone, and mostly forgotten — until a trio of archivists came knocking.

James R. Beach, Brian Naron and J.D. Sutton were in the midst of writing a book, "Rusted Metal," a chronicle of the Northwest's heavy metal music, and they stumbled upon Whizkey Stik.

"I thought it was cool that they were gonna do a book on the subject and wanted to know about us," McLaughlin says. "I'm a 61-year-old young man — who woulda thought? I thought it was really cool."

The writers came to Astoria to do an interview and were taken aback when they heard Whizkey Stik's



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

The reunited Whizkey Stik band is made of, from left, Mark Bugas on bass guitar, Carl McLaughlin on lead guitar and vocals,

long-buried demo tapes.

"We played him our music," McLaughlin says. "He was like, 'Where can you get a hold of it?' I said it's never been released. He said: 'You're (kidding) me. We're going to do something about that.'"

And so, in tandem with the release of the book this September, NW Metalworx will offer LPs and CDs from Whizkey Stik. The album, "On the Level," is available in black vinyl and magenta vinyl as well as CD. The band plans to perform at release shows in Portland and Seattle this fall, though they will be without keyboardist Terry Duoos, who passed away in March 2012 — before the music was rediscovered.

"The album has a pretty significant dedication to him," McLaughlin says.

"And certainly the bio that I wrote. It stressed a lot of kudos, gratitude to him."

Approaching the performances, McLaughlin is excited and seemingly undaunted — he's been playing and performing, albeit in other styles, ever since. As for the record, he's just glad it's finally seeing the light of day — and that, in the internet age, it should be preserved.

"It's pretty neat to think that your music really has the capacity to potentially last forever," McLaughlin says. "Many, many years after you're gone it could still be there somewhere and hopefully it will be."

Whizkey Stik will hold a record signing at 3 p.m. Sept. 17 at Metal Head Records, located at 1126 Marine Drive in Astoria.