



# HAVE GUTS, WILL TRAVEL

## *The return of* **THE SONICS**

By Marsh Gooch

**OUT OF ALL THE ROCK BANDS THAT WERE PLAYING THE CIRCUIT OF TEEN** clubs and high school dances in the Pacific Northwest in the early '60s, none but Tacoma, WA's Sonics can claim to have inspired hundreds of bands to try and out-rock them. **THE WAILERS** may have been the first to be recognized outside of the region, **THE KINGSMEN** may have taken their version of "Louie, Louie" into the Top 40, and **PAUL REVERE & THE RAIDERS** may have had more hits, but no one could claim as many songs with the sheer intensity of "Psycho," "Strychnine," "The Witch," "Cinderella," "You Got Your Head On Backwards," et al. And this was only over the stretch of three albums! Still in print today, 1965's *Here Are The Sonics*, 1966's *Boom*, and 1967's *Introducing The Sonics* are got-to-have slabs of rock history. Mix **LARRY PARYPA's** guitar, his brother **ANDY's** bass, **ROB LIND's** dirty sax, **BOB BENNETT's** caveman drums, and **JERRY ROSLIE's** keyboards and outta this world *scream*, and you've got the ingredients of a primordial rock stew that has never been equaled. So it makes sense that it took multiple attempts by the organizers of Cavestomp to finally get the Sonics together—after over 30 years!

I pounced on the chance to interview original Sonics Rosalie, Parypa, and Lind recently, a couple of months after they played Seattle's Paramount Theatre on Halloween 2008—35 years since their last hometown appearance! Nearly every famous and almost-famous musician from within a 500 mile radius was in attendance—as well as *Sopranos* "Silvio" himself, **LITTLE STEVEN VAN ZANDT**, who MCed and played on a few numbers such as "Have Love, Will Travel." As on their 2007 and 2008 dates, the band was joined by **DON WILHELM** on bass (an original member of Seattle's '60s group, **THE DAILY FLASH**) and **RICKY LYNN JOHNSON** on drums. (Bennett is no longer able to play regularly with the band due to health issues, but he did join them on stage for a few numbers.)

The interviews took place over the phone on a very stormy day, where we were disconnected two or three times. Transcription services were provided by **SUZY YAP**. Thanks to Sonics manager/Wailers bassist **BUCK ORMSBY** for putting this together, and for running Etiquette Records and releasing the band's records in the first place!

Oh, yeah. It is really weird! It's a déjà vu thing. I'm thinking, "God dang, I never thought I'd be doing this again. At this age!" And everywhere we played, from New York to England and Spain, what blew my mind is that the crowd looked about the same age as when we'd left! I couldn't believe it.

**MG:** What made you decide in 2007 to get back together, after not having performed together in over 30 years?

**JERRY:** The promoter in New York who does Cavestomp [John Weiss] had been after us for several years. And every time he called we'd say, "Nah." We didn't have enough time to practice for it. And every year he'd ask us to do it again, and he'd offer a little more money, and we'd say, "Oh, gee, we just don't have the time to practice."

**LARRY:** We had an agreement with John, which caused a lot of havoc for him, because we couldn't commit. He would call all the time and say, "What do you think, are you going to be able to do it?" And for months we would say, "We just don't know."

**JERRY:** Finally he gave us this real good figure for money and all that. But he [also] gave us plenty of time, about a year or something, before we'd have to do the show. And we said, with that kind of time, we *might* be able to practice and get it done. So we said, "We'll start practicing, and we'll let you know if we can do it!"

**ROB:** We wanted to be real careful, because we were protective of our reputation. We wanted to make sure that the first time we stepped out in front of people, we didn't blow it, and blow the reputation from the '60s when we were playing all the time.

**JERRY:** So we practiced quite a bit! And I think it was about two months before the actual show was to take place, we said, "OK, we can do this!" And he said, "OK, you're on!" And so we went for it.

**MG:** So were you thinking, even up until the last moment, that there might be the possibility that you would just decide, "I don't think so?"

**ROB:** We held that in reserve. The three of us, Jerry, Larry and I, had the tacit agreement that if we looked at each other one day and said, "We're not ready," the next thing we would have done is call the promoter and say, "Nah-ah, we aren't gonna do it." Our reputation was more important to us than going out and playing.

**MG:** Had you been playing much over the years?

**ROB:** No, actually not! I was an airline pilot, and I was just playing to entertain myself in my music room. Jerry and I, basically several years ago, pretty much started [playing again] from scratch. Larry had been playing a little bit, and he was more accomplished than the two of us were. But it took a lot of practice, and it took a lot of writing.

**MG:** Jerry, you hadn't sung or played keyboards much in all that time?

**JERRY:** No, not really. Hardly ever. I just figured that was a section of my life I probably wouldn't do again! But I'm glad we have, so far.

**MG:** When you first attempted to sing again, how did you go about warming yourself up, back to the level of [*insane!*—ed.] singing that you used to do? How did you work up to that?

**JERRY:** That took some practicing. Because the vocal chords are a muscle, and if you don't use them, they go into nothing. So I was pretty soft. When I do sing, I sing so loud, I was afraid I would get arrested in my neighborhood. So when I had to do the screamin' I

had to go into the closet. So I'd be singing "The Witch" and "Psycho" in one of my hall closets in the living room!

**MG:** That must've felt weird.

**JERRY:** Yeah, it did. I didn't like it, but I didn't want to have people thinking I was losing my mind. My neighbors don't know that I'm even *in* a band. So if I'm in the house screaming they probably think they should call the cops or something.

**LARRY:** It just took a long time to almost relearn the instruments. We had to listen to our own songs and relearn them. It was literally three months or so [before] we could finally say, "Yes, we can definitely do it."

**MG:** So when you hit the stage that night at Cavestomp in New York, how did it feel, after so long?

**LARRY:** [I was] scared shitless! I think we forgot things that we had rehearsed because we were... just scared.

**MG:** But those kinds of things happen with any band, right? Forgetting parts that you rehearsed? Somebody forgets that you decided you'd go through that one part twice, or whatever?

**LARRY:** I suppose it does, but it was just a higher degree because everything was so new to us. The way things sounded; the fact that we're on a stage again, hearing things through monitors that don't sound right. And then just ring rust.

**MG:** But you went on, and I have to imagine that the crowd was pretty insane.

**LARRY:** Yeah, and that was shocking! I mean, I had no idea... There were people who flew in from Europe and they were so adoring. It still feels really good the way they received us there. We had no idea it was going to be that way.

**MG:** After you did Cavestomp, you went on to do some shows in London, the first time you'd *ever* played there. How was that?

**LARRY:** It was really cool in the respect that it was a larger room, and there was a balcony, and in the balcony were all the bald spots! All the older people were there, probably people in their 50s and 60s. And then down below were all these younger people in their 20s and 30s. And I just thought it was really cool that such a wide range of ages and styles of music showed up for it. It was just amazing. And they were also very responsive, just like they were in New York. So we felt great about that.

**MG:** Did you feel like the younger people were going to hold you up to a higher degree of crazy insanity on stage, because of the legend that they'd heard about?

**LARRY:** I think so. We all thought that, number one, we'll look real old, and that's probably a turn-off, and they'd also expect [us to be] the bad boys of rock. But we're not really the bad boys of rock anymore!

**MG:** But the thing is you still *sound* like it.

**LARRY:** That's all we really want, is intensity. We want things to sound as intense as we can possibly make it. Forget about whether or not we're respected musicians or something—that's not the point. The point is did we get so much energy across that you can't help but feel it? And we still do that.

**MG:** Well, I certainly felt it at the Paramount that night; the first time I'd ever seen you!

**LARRY:** Yeah, that was the whole point. We're not gonna be some sexy young little group, and people aren't gonna write about our mastery of our instruments. But did they feel the intensity of that kind of music? And our music style is still somewhat different than anybody else's. It's still not really punk, and it's still not metal. It's different. It's Sonics music; it's Sonics songs.

**MG:** When you were writing these songs back in the '60s, how did you come up with the subject matter? Were you trying to do a twist on the typical songs of the day, or were you trying to go for something completely different?

**JERRY:** I'm kind of different, I'm kind of an oddball, I guess you'd say, and I like things that are different, and preferably powerful. Otherwise you get "Tiptoe Through The Tulips" [TINY TIM'S 1968 #17 remake of the 1926 song] or something.

**MG:** Well, that's a far cry from "Strychnine!"

**JERRY:** Yeah, speaking for my own self, that's the way I like music. I like all kinds of music. I like soft music, but I like it where you know that whoever's doing it is really *feeling* it. Because then I can feel their soul.

When you're five guys driving around the country in a Cadillac, like we were for months at a time, playing gig after gig after gig, and you're in close quarters, and you have egos and tempers and you're immature—it's a lot different than we are now!

**MG:** I think it's pretty amazing how many bands look back to the Sonics and go, "I wanna sound like *that*." Even though they don't necessarily mean it literally, they want to have the vibe that you guys have, which is unlike anybody else's.

**JERRY:** Yeah, I think so. The vibe and the spirit, or whatever it is.

**MG:** There are a couple of bands like that. I think The Sonics and **THE STOOGES** had a very similar effect on people. Not that the Stooges sound anything like The Sonics, but [you're both] in that category of bands that were just unlike anybody else. And it's so amazing that you're still playing. When you get up there now, and you're behind your keyboard and screaming into the mic, do you feel like, "Man, I can't believe I'm doing this"?

**JERRY:** Oh, yeah. It is really weird! It's a *déjà vu* thing. I'm thinking, "God dang, I never thought I'd be doing this again. At this age!" And especially, everywhere we played, from New York to England and Spain, what blew my mind is that the crowd looked about the same age as when we'd left! I couldn't believe it.

**MG:** I think people, if they haven't seen you, or haven't seen you in 40 years, they kind of expect you're not gonna have the energy level

you had back then.

**ROB:** We run into that a lot. We frequently, after a show, have people come up to us and say, "Holy cow, we had no idea you guys could do that!" Well, that's what we do. We weren't gonna do it unless we could do it really good. We didn't want to be "OK," we wanted it to be real good. So we worked real hard to get there.

**MG:** Did you feel you had to work hard to get the feel of your sax, the way you played it back then?

**ROB:** Yeah, it takes some practice. But I'm older and wiser, and I listened to a lot of the stuff that I played back then and came to the conclusion that back then I was trying to play too fast, [and] to play an awful lot of notes! I always tried to play dirty and hard, that was always my thing. Because that's the way Larry plays guitar, and that's the way Bob Bennett played drums. So we all tried to play that way—as hard as we could, as dirty as we could. Now, I still play that same way, but I don't try to play so many notes. I try to make my sax solos a little simpler and a little more cutting.

**MG:** You don't feel any temptation to screw with it, to modernize it?

**ROB:** All of us try to push boundaries a little bit, and we rehearse frequently. And with The Sonics, with the five of us in a room rehearsing, we're safe with each other.

**MG:** Is there a feeling of solidarity or camaraderie now that feels different than it did then?

**ROB:** Yeah, in a way I think there is. The three of us have known each other since we were 16, so there's a certain shared understanding. We have the ability now to criticize—and I mean that in the artistic term, I don't mean harsh criticism. To say, "Maybe it'd be better if you tried it this other way," and be open-minded about it and not get our feelings hurt. I'm not sure when we were 19 and 20 and full of ourselves that... Obviously we didn't have the maturity to look at things that way. So we can disagree, and frequently we do; but there's no heat in it.

**MG:** Like there may have been back then.

**ROB:** Yeah, you know... When you're five guys driving around the country in a Cadillac, like we were for months at a time, playing gig after gig after gig, and you're in close quarters, and you have egos and tempers and you're immature—it's a lot different than we are now. It's a lot more comfortable now than it was [then]. And that's just because of that shared experience.

**MG:** Now that you're beyond a lot of that youthful hotheadedness, you can get to the making of music quicker. Speaking of that, a question people reading this interview are likely to have is: will you be making any new music?

**LARRY:** Yeah, that's what we're about to do now! Jerry and I are putting down ideas for different songs. But it has to be something that represents the way it sounded then and now, and it has to be the right song. But yes, we are going to do that.

**ROB:** We're in the process of putting a [live] demo together to take down to SXSW with us, with a lot of pictures and some live performances, and also a couple of covers of songs that we haven't done before, just as a demo. We'd like to—and are planning to—get back into the studio and do a complete release of a new CD by next summer.

**MG:** Well, I hope you keep playing, and don't wait too long to play back here.

**ROB:** Well, thanks so much, it was a real pleasure talking to you, and I know I echo that from Jerry and Larry. ☺