

Forgotten Hits

Tuesday, October 20, 2009

Preston Ritter of The Electric Prunes Remembers Reprise Records

Forgotten Hits Member Preston Ritter, the original drummer for The Electric Prunes, agreed to share some of his Reprise Records memories with our readers:

The Electric Prunes were on the Reprise label, owned at the time by Frank Sinatra. It was part of Warner Brothers.

However, the band was not signed to the label directly. We were signed to the production company of Dave Hassinger. Hassinger was the top staff recording engineer for RCA at the time. He had recorded most of the early hits by the Rolling Stones as well as groups like The Byrds and The Monkees. His production company, DAMO PRODUCTIONS, was actually signed to Warners / Reprise.

What was happening was Dave wanted a production deal with one of the big labels. He used The Electric Prunes as his bargaining chip. He went to Decca Records and Electra Records first. They were both interested in the Prunes, but rejected Dave's demand that he be the top producer on the label. Finally, Warners / Reprise accepted his offer. So DAMO PRODUCTIONS was signed to the label and The Electric Prunes were signed to DAMO. That meant that any royalties would be paid by the label to Dave Hassinger's company. He then was responsible to pay the band our share of the royalties. More on that later.

We were so happy to be working with a famous name that was associated with the Stones and other big name bands that we were largely unaware of what was going on behind the scenes of our record company, record producer (Hassinger) and our regular manager.

I remember when we first started hearing "I Had Too Much To Dream (Last Night)" on the radio. It was very exciting! We would run to the phone and call family and friends to tell them it was on and to turn on their radio before it ended. Then as the record climbed the charts, it was getting air play every hour. It actually made it to the number one slot in some big markets. It broke first in Seattle, then in Boston. Our first live concert to back up the record was in an ice hockey stadium in Seattle. On the same bill were The Turtles and B.J. Thomas. We later also toured with The Turtles, Buffalo Springfield, The Left Banke, and many others on the Beach Boys' "Pet Sounds" tour. (I'm sure Howard Kaylan remembers that tour). We also toured with Jimi Hendrix and Cream later in our careers.

We had no idea that we were making history at the time. Later, in interviews with Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Todd Rundgren, Pink Floyd and even the Beatles, we were mentioned as an "influence" on things they were doing. But we didn't know that until years later. Among other trivia, we were the first band to use and record with the famous "wah-wah" pedal invented by VOX. The radio commercial we did for that is now a collector's item and even found on some compilation CDs.

Probably the biggest thrill for me, was when we were recording at RCA studios in Hollywood at the same time The Rolling Stones were recording their album, "Aftermath." Since Dave Hassinger was their engineer on that album and he was our producer, we got to be at their recording sessions. When they would take a break in "Studio A," everyone would go next door to "Studio B" where we were recording. When the Stones were ready to go back to work, we stopped what we were doing and we all went back into "Studio A" to watch them record. Hassinger was working with both groups, of course. I also remember Micky Dolenz of the Monkees poking his head into the control room while we were recording and shouting, "Far out!!" It was a great time for us. That was around 1966-67.

The downside of our experience was the contract situation with Dave Hassinger's production company. He got the royalties from our records and we were not paid a dime. Many years later, we had a law suit and got paid a very small amount of what was owed to us. I think if I had worked at McDonald's for the same amount of time I put into the Prunes, I would have made more money! I was only seventeen years old, the youngest in the band, when I was in The Electric Prunes.

But even though it wasn't much for profit, it was still an exciting time of my life that I feel blessed to have been a part of. I still play drums for a living and I've been trying to re-establish contact with many of the friends I made during the '60s, from other bands of that era and even many of the fans. It has been more fun the last few years, largely due to the Internet and publications like yours, than it was when I was involved in the chaos that was the music business of the sixties.

It was fun to have experienced the screaming girls, being chased down the street, just like the Beatles were in "A Hard Day's Night," and being on most of the big television shows of that era. Hearing your records on the radio no matter what city you go to, and even in foreign countries is a thrill that is hard to explain. The life of a professional musician on the road can be difficult, but we all live for those few moments we are on stage, performing for our fans! That's what makes all the hassles of being on the road and the "business" garbage worth it. For a musician, performing is what it's all about. The "business" part is mostly a negative hassle.

-- Preston Ritter

[Click here: Preston Ritter's Page](#)

[Click here: MySpace - Preston - 60 - Male - CANYON COUNTRY, CALIFORNIA - myspace.com/drumming_man](#)

Thanks, Preston! "I Had Too Much To Dream (Last Night)" by The Electric Prunes is a '60's classic ... in fact, it ranked right near the top of our recent Top 20 All-Time Favorite Psychedelic Songs Poll. You can read those results (and more about The Electric Prunes) in that piece now posted on The Forgotten Hits Web Page: [Click here: Forgotten Hits - Top 20 Favorite Psychedelic Songs](#)

... and you can LISTEN to this great track right here:

And, of course, one of the COOLEST things about Forgotten Hits is that if you want to know what Howard Kaylan remembers about the tour with The Electric Prunes and B.J. Thomas, we can ASK him!!!

Man, I remember first seeing the Prunes in Seattle. I lived in LA at the time, knew BJ Thomas, but hadn't yet heard "Too Much To Dream" until that night. All of us knew, instantly, that it would be a huge record and, it seems, by the time we got back to Laurel Canyon, it already was.

Their moniker was almost enough to guarantee success in those days, but that wobbly guitar and the "gone gone gone" of the verses really clinched it. That, and the fact that it had a major label PR machine behind it, assured it airplay. And once you heard it, it was one of those records that you just HAD to own.

The Thirteenth Floor Elevator and even the First Edition never released as catchy a psychedelic hit. That song represents one very singular era when hippies ruled the world and corporations all scrambled to own a piece of the pie.

It probably wouldn't have been a hit in any other decade, but we were all wide-eyed and innocent and struggling for attention and the Prunes represented our passion and angst.

Long live the sixties and long live the Prunes.

Howard Kaylan

www.howardkaylan.com

Posted by [Kent Kotal](#) at 6:13 AM  

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About Me



Kent Kotal

Chicago, Illinois, United States

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