

The Lost Gonzo Band – Their History + A Year Late, Their 35th Anniversary Gig

On 7th August 1970, Eddie Wilson, these days proprietor of Austin's Threadgill Restaurants, and some friends opened the Armadillo World Headquarters in a former national guard armoury located on Barton Springs Road, thereby continuing to entice [*] major rock acts to include the Texas capital in their tour schedule. In time country acts such as Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings and Commander Cody began appearing at the venue – Jimmie Dale Gilmore's band Hub City Movers played the first night of the 'Dillo opening for Shiva's Headband - and concurrently listening clubs [like Castle Creek and Soap Creek Saloon] sprang up in a city where Jerry Jeff Walker, Michael Murphey and Steven Fromholz soon held sway as musician's *on the rise*.

Walker, real name Ronald Clyde Crosby, was born during March 1942 in Oneonta, New York and began his recording career in 1967 with the band Circus Maximus. Assisted by David Bromberg, during 1968 Walker recorded his solo debut **"Mr. Bojangles"** for the Atco label. Murphey was born March 1945 in Oak Cliff, Texas and raised in Dallas. Aged twenty-two, and based in L.A. where he had studied history and literature at U.C.L.A., Michael made his debut recording as member of the Lewis & Clark Expedition. Their self-titled album was issued by Colgems, the Monkees label, and Murphey subsequently collaborated with Larry Cansler on the Kenny Rogers & The First Edition thematic song cycle/double album **"The Ballad Of Calico"** [1972]. Born 8th June 1945 in Temple, Texas, at the age of twenty Fromholz was drafted into the U.S. Navy. Subsequently based in San Francisco, Steven reignited his music career by performing in local music clubs. After leaving the Navy in 1968, Fromholz settled in Colorado and teamed with Dan McCrimmon as FrummoX, who made their recording debut with **"Here To There"** [1969]. Steven was subsequently a member of Stephen Stills' Manassas, but departed before that band began recording. By the early seventies, separately, the foregoing trio had gravitated to Austin, and concurrently the city had become a magnet for support players leading to the birth of the Austin Interchangeable Band, a combo with an ever evolving line-up.

By 1972 Murphey had scored a recording deal with A&M Records and his Bob Johnston produced debut **"Geronimo's Cadillac"** featured contributions from 'interchangeables' Bob Livingston [bass, vocals] and Gary P. Nunn [keyboards, bass, vocals]. Murphey's **"Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir"** [1973], also produced by Johnston, was recorded in Nashville and featured the latter pair plus Michael McGeary [drums], Herb Steiner [mandolin, pedal steel] and Craig Hillis [guitar]. Onstage with Murphey they performed as the Cosmic Cowboy Orchestra. Employing constantly changing band names, many whimsical – some that would even embarrass your maiden aunt, concurrently, the latter quintet performed with Jerry Jeff Walker and contributed to his MCA label debut **"Jerry Jeff Walker"** [1972] – the first of a string of Free Flow productions credited to Walker's, then, manager Michael Brovsky.

During the summer of 1972 Livingston was devouring the late Hunter S. Thompson's [d. 2005] latest tome **"Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas: A Savage Journey To The Heart Of The American Dream"** [+]. Therein he stumbled across Dr. Gonzo, one of the novel's principal protagonists, and hence the nom de plume Lost Gonzo Band was born. On Saturday 18th August 1973 the *nascent* Lost Gonzo's and sundry others gathered in Luckenbach to record Jerry Jeff's live album **"Viva Terlingua"** – the late Hondo Crouch's right hand points to the concert poster that graces the album cover. For the recording session McGeary recruited his California based buddy Kelly Dunn [keyboards], while in terms of songs performed the collection closed with Nunn's "London Homesick Blues" and also featured Ray Wylie Hubbard's "Up Against The Wall Redneck Mother." The former tune was penned in Britain's capital when Nunn toured there with Murphey, while Hubbard's song dated from his long Red River, New Mexico sojourn – Red River being the location in which Bob Livingston had spent his high school summer vacations. The latter tunes subsequently ascended to anthemic status in the pantheon of Texas music – a few years later Nunn's tune became the theme of the pioneering TV music show Austin City Limits.

By the time Jacky Jack aka Jerry Jeff recorded **"Walker's Collectibles"** [1974] and **"Ridin' High"** [1975] Austin bred guitarist John Inmon had joined the Gonzo fold, as had drummer Donny Dolan, while Messrs. McGeary, Steiner and Hillis departed [#]. Inmon and Nunn had previously been members of the band Genessee. Having scored a deal with the MCA label, saxophonist Tomas Ramirez became the sixth Gonzo, and their Michael Brovsky produced self-titled debut appeared in 1975. Inmon, Nunn and Livingston composed the ten songs, on occasion in collaboration with Murphey, Bobby Smith [who for a short time was a Gonzo] and Dallas Brooks. The track "Reality" was credited to M. D. Shafter. As far as I

know, Shafter's identity has not previously been revealed in print. Music writer Bud Shrake was the lyricist, while the melody was, as the occasion dictated, furnished by Livingston or Nunn.

By the time the Brodsky produced "**Thrills**" appeared the following year, Ramirez had departed. As with the Gonzo's debut, Inmon, Nunn and Livingston were the principle writers, on their own or in association with Bobby Smith, Donna Ciscel, Ray Wylie Hubbard, Anne Kennedy and Rafael Diaz. The disc included Roger Bartlett's "Sweet Little Lily," and closed with "I'll Come Knockin'" penned by the late Walter Hyatt [d. 1996] leader of local combo Uncle Walt's Band. On the strength of positive press reviews in a number of national publications the Gonzo's took the decision to retain Brodsky as their manager/producer, and in 1977 left Jerry Jeff and struck out on their own. Signing with Capitol Records, by the time they cut "**Signs Of Life**" [1978] Michael J. Holloman had taken over the drum stool, while the addition of Bobby Smith [bass] allowed Livingston to move to guitar while continuing to share lead vocal duties [with Nunn and Inmon].

The *usual suspects* provided the bulk of the songs - Bob composed the title cut with his wife Iris, while "Getaway" was an Uncle Walt classic penned by Hyatt, David Ball and the late Champ Hood [d. 2001]. The collection opened with Michael Burton's "Beacon In The Night" - Nanci Griffith included Burton's "Night Rider's Lament" on her 1993 contemporary folk Grammy winner "**Other Voices, Other Rooms**" - and, published by Nunn, "**Signs Of Life**" closed with Mike Acklin's "Feelin' My Way." With Austinite Paul Percy occupying the drum stool, the following year the band cut another album but Capitol was less than impressed with the results and label and band parted ways. The same year Livingston, Inmon and Percy assisted Ray Wylie Hubbard to record "**Something About The Night.**" When the band's tour vehicles broke down during a bitterly cold Nebraska winter in early 1980 the Gonzo's decided to go their separate ways.....well, for a time.

Before we move on, let's fill in a few gaps. During early 1976, Livingston, Nunn and Inmon contributed as session players on Fromholz's Capitol Records release "**A Rumor In My Own Time.**" The Lost Gonzo Band performed on Austin City Limits in Seasons 1 & 3 [1976/1978] and supported Steven Fromholz, Jerry Jeff Walker, Gary P. Nunn, Rusty Wier, Tracy Nelson, Asleep at the Wheel, Greezy Wheels and Marcia Ball on the 1986 Reunion Special. During late July 1975, Dolan, Inmon, Nunn, Livingston and narrator Slim Pickens [and others] traveled with Bobby Bridger to Timberjack Joe's tipi in the Colorado Rockies where they recorded "**Seekers Of The Fleece**" the first part of Bridger's epic trilogy "**A Ballad Of The West.**" Quarter of a century later, at Austin's Moon on the Hill Studio, Inmon, Livingston, Percy and others assisted Bridger to record "**Pahaska**" and "**Lakota.**" "**A Ballad Of The West**" was released as a four CD set the following year.

Following the Gonzo's 1980 break-up Nunn settled in Oklahoma and launched his solo recording career with "**Home With The Armadillo: Live At Austin City Limits**" [1983] and to date has released around a dozen titles. During the early '80's, billing themselves as the Gonzo Survivors, John, Paul and Bob occasionally performed as a trio in Austin clubs. John and Bob rejoined Jacky Jack midway through the 1980's, and with Freddie Krc occupying the drum stool were billed as the Gonzo Compadres. John left Walker's employment in 2002 and Bob in 2006. An in-demand session player, record producer, and Jimmy LaFave sideman in recent years, release of Inmon's debut solo album "**Goodbye Easy Street**" is imminent. As for Bob Livingston's solo recording career that began in 1981 with "**Waking Up**" and has seen him release five more albums, including a collection of children's songs. Since 1987, as a performing musician, Livingston [latterly accompanied by his son Tucker] has toured the Middle East and Asia on behalf of the U.S. State Department.

Reinforced by Reese Wynans [keyboards], Davis McLarty [drums] and album producer Lloyd Maines [pedal steel, dobro, mandolin, lap steel] - and others - John, Bob and Gary celebrated the Gonzo's twentieth anniversary with "**Rendezvous**" [1991]. Maines was also at the controls when, four years later, 'the band' cut the sixteen song "**Hands Of Time.**" On the latter occasion Inmon, Percy, Livingston, Ramirez, Maines and Riley Osbourn [keyboards] were supported by sundry 'guest Gonzo's.' During 1996 U.K. based Demon/Edsel Records issued "**Dead Armadillos**" a compilation of the Gonzo's two MCA albums, although restricted by disc length, Nunn's "Gimme Some Money" and Inmon/Smith's "Love Drops" from the debut album were dropped.

In 2002 the Gonzo's performed a thirtieth anniversary concert during Austin's annual South by Southwest music business junket. On the evening of Sunday 3rd June 2007, an intense electrical storm

passed over the Quiet Valley Ranch, home to the Kerrville Folk Festival, leading to the cancellation of the Gonzo's thirty-fifth anniversary concert. Twelve months later – Monday 26th May - they tried again, and on this occasion played their hearts out. Kelly Dunn flew in from California, while time served Gonzo's Livingston, Inmon, Nunn and Percy were augmented by Maines and Radoslav Lorkovic [piano, accordion].

Penned by Nunn and Dallas Brooks and the closing track on the Gonzo's self-titled debut, Livingston supported by Nunn and Inmon launched their 'year delayed' Kerrville set with "Fool For A Tender Touch," and Livingston emulated Michael Martin Murphey's unique vocal phrasing while performing the latter's "Alleys Of Austin." Although never recorded by the Gonzo's, "Alleys" is a number familiar to Bob and Gary since they contributed to the writer's "**Cosmic Cowboy Souvenir**" version. The story goes that Murphey visited Rapp's Cleaners – a studio located in a former Austin laundromat, which subsequently became Odyssey Sound - while 'his band' were assisting Walker to cut his 1972 MCA album. Following his visit, Murphey penned the song.

Inmon's "Relief," co-written with Bobby Smith, appeared on the group's sophomore outing, and stepping up to the microphone John sang his heart out - even indulged a little scat singing – and was supported by instrumental solos from Dunn and Maines. Having intimated "*I can feel the love tonight on the Quiet Valley Ranch*," Nunn went on to perform "Gimme Some Money." The initial, cassette only, pressing of Jerry Jeff "**Gypsy Songman**" [1985] featured the Livingston/Nunn co-write "Public Domain." When Walker's twenty-two track cassette was released on vinyl and CD the song was dropped, but that didn't prevent the sextet from celebrating with a 35th anniversary rendition.

Dipping once more into "**Thrills**," Livingston performed his "Wilderness Song" while Nunn took the lead vocal on the closing cut from that album - Hyatt's "I'll Come Knockin'." During the late 1970's the Gonzo's cut a Nunn penned tune for Lone Star Beer, although the song never appeared on any of the Gonzo's commercial releases [&]. To a man the sextet rose to the occasion with a 2008 interpretation of "The Nights They Never Get Lonely," and followed with Bobby Bridger's "Rendezvous." Bridger walked on from stage left and vocally assisted Livingston with the title cut from their twentieth anniversary release.

Nunn's "London Homesick Blues" appeared on "**Signs Of Life**" and the writer brought the Gonzo's performance to a climax with a rousing rendition. With the Gonzo's once again assembled on stage they encored with a couple of tunes from their debut set – Inmon's "Railroad Man" and Nunn's "People Will Dance." The former was introduced with the aside "*This is a song about integrity, in election year it might be nice to think about that*," while the closing number included extended solos from Messrs. Maines, Percy and Inmon.

Note.

[*] – Wilson's previous music venue, Vulcan Gas Company, had closed earlier that year.

[+] – Circa November 1971, the book's main characters made their debut in a two-part Thompson article in Rolling Stone magazine.

[#] – Steiner and Hillis contributed to Murphey's self-titled third album, another Johnston production. Hillis subsequently formed Moon Hill Management, became a music club owner, record producer and a published music historian.

[&] – Nunn included the song on his debut solo album.

Arthur Wood.

Kerrville Kronikles 06/08 & 07/08.

[2160 words]