

Mike's First Gig with Barry

by Mike Haskins

Scene: Irving YMCA rec room / dance hall, hot afternoon, autumn 1968.

My band, "Train," is sound checking for the YMCA dance we are playing tonight. Suddenly, mid-song, Rick the drummer stops playing. He grabs a drumstick in his left hand, holds it vertically pointing down at his snare drum, and slams down on the blunt end with his right palm. The stick drives through the snare heads. "I'm tired of this shit! I quit!"

Bill the lead singer/ lead guitar player unplugs. "Me too! Let's get out of here!"

The two storm out the door. Steve (the bass player who joined the band the night before) and I (second guitar/ second singer/ music director) shrugged, looked at our moccasins, and began idly plunking our instruments. What happens now?

A few minutes later, Barry

coolly strolled in. "What are you guys doing?"

"Well, two of the guys just got mad and split. I guess they won't be playing the show tonight."

"What are you gonna do?"

"I have no idea."

"But they left their equipment behind?"

"Guess so."

"Look, I can play drums.

The three of us can play the job."

"Who's gonna sing?"

"We'll trade off, take turns. Come on."

This is the type of dare I could not resist.

"Yeah, why not. We'll need two sets of material and a snare drum."

I knew Barry Kooda (then Huebner) sorta casually from junior high seventh grade. He was a year ahead of me and hung with a very different crowd from me. I think we called them greasers (referring to biker chic and greased back,

non-hippie, hair) or rednecks. Jocks or gangstas might be more current terms. I was an intellectual, homeroom class president, nerd geek. I was totally uncool on the outside, with a raving wild man rock star inside, bursting to get out.

In the eighth-ninth grade (1967-69), I started checking out the bands at the National

“
...raving wild man
rock star inside,
bursting to get out.”

Guard Armory Friday night dances. One night, The Crowd Plus One (later to find fame as Bloodrock with "DOA") were kicking ass. As usual, I was standing at the back of the hall with my arms folded, acting unimpressed and coolly

critiquing the show. Then I realized that another guy was standing next to me with the same posture, doing the same thing. It was Barry.

"Wadda ya think?"

"Not too bad. The singer's goofy but the guitar player's good."

"Yeah. How you getting home?"

"Walking I guess."

"Me too. You ready to walk?"

It turned out that Barry lived just down the street from the house my family had just moved into. We started hanging out some, listening to music, and

playing guitars a little.

Throughout this time, I was playing bass and guitar in a succession of garage bands, playing mostly British Invasion type material (some surf and country). The Lower Class was my first paying gig, summer

1967. I received five bucks, a roll of dimes. I couldn't believe it. I was walking on air. People would pay me to play music! Don't let anybody know, but I would have paid them to let me!

Train was the latest in this series of bedroom / garage bands. The name indicates a yearning for that down-home authentic blues vibe, but the music was more the usual Brit Rock Yardbirds / Stones / Kinks / Who suburban punk repertoire. We booked a date at the Irving YMCA. Also on the bill was a white boy Brit Blues (Cream / Mayall / Butterfield, etc.) band built around Darrell Neulisch (still a successful blues recording artist today) on vocals and Kim Davis, the hottest guitar player at Irving High, maybe even in the whole city. The YMCA booked us for a promo photo shoot for the local paper (check out attached photo).

Then, two of our members resigned their positions with just a few hours before showtime. Barry volunteered his services and we began to quickly draw up a song list to

play. When I stepped out into the hallway for a break, the YMCA Director stormed up and got right in my face,



incoherently yelling. Finally, he slowed down a bit.

“I can't believe you're pullin this crap!”

“Huh?”

“Canceling a date at the last minute! Leaving me high and dry!”

“No wait, you got the wrong guy. I'm the one who's gonna play the show. You're mad at

those other guys.”

“Oh yeah. Wait a minute.

You're the other kid, the one I'm really angry at. I want you

anything.”

I don't believe that I really convinced him of my innocence, but eventually he calmed down and left us to prepare for the show.

Showtime! I had changed into bell-bottoms, Nehru jacket, beads, and moccasins. Barry and Steve were similarly decked out. We played our dance classics “Season Of The Witch,” “Gloria,” “You're Gonna Miss Me,” “Louie, Louie,” “Back Door Man,” “Soul Kitchen” (Barry could do a great Jim Morrison impression). When my

friend Mike Quine heard the first song, he realized that we were winging it. He jumped on his bike, went home for his guitar, and returned to play the rest of the night with us.

Now here's the curious part. The arrangement was that we would play a set first, the blues band played a set, we played third, and they finished with the fourth set. Well, we played

to leave now and never come back!”

“Huh?”

“You made that really nasty rude hand gesture in the publicity photo in the paper! Get out now!”

He waved the picture angrily in my face.

I talked fast. “No, no, you got it wrong. That's a different finger. It doesn't mean

our first set and the kids loved it. They danced, hooted, and had fun. Then the serious, cool, virtuoso blues band comes on and the kids do not dig it. Not at all. My friend, the YMCA Director, stalked me outside during the break.

“Why don’t you guys just play out the rest of the night instead of having the blues band back. That would make a better show.”

“OK, I guess.”

The last set. A moment I will always remember.

You see, at this time in my short musical career, I was a pretty good second guitarist and bass player. I was even a fairly competent drummer and second singer. However, when it came to blues-rock improvised on the spot burning lead guitar solos, I had no clue. I mean, where do you start? Where do you go from there? It was a mystery to me.

So, mid set, Quine is singing “Season Of The Witch” (part two, I guess). He turns to me. “Take it, Mike.”

Take what? Take it where? Oh well, here goes nothing. Let’s see, the song’s in A, so let’s start with an A. That sounds good, hit it again. OK, now move up a note. Sounds all right. Move up another note. Whoops, sounds wrong. This song has to end sometime soon.

Well, I survived that trial by fire. We finished the show. Everybody had a good time. I think we even got paid.

As I was packing up, Kim Davis sauntered over to me. “Ah hurd yore little guitar solo there, Haskins,” he drawled. “Wha don chew come ba ma house after school next week. Ah’ll show you sum stuff.”

True to his word, Kim revealed the secrets of the blues guitar to me in one easy lesson. In fact, that’s the only guitar lesson I ever received. I’m still working to digest all of its implications.

At the time, I thought that this gig experience demonstrated to me the poor taste of the general public audience. After all, they preferred our seat of the pants garage punk



offerings to the obviously superior (in my mind, anyway) serious hip blues band. Although they never bothered to apologize or explain (that would not be cool), I think maybe my two bandmates quit in frustration at this perceived coolness shortage in our band.

However, in the months that followed, as Barry and I continued hanging out and playing music, he began to impart his sense of bravado to me. We’re as good as those guys, maybe better. This

attitude became invaluable in all our future efforts. Not arrogance, but confidence. So maybe the real lesson for me was that I shouldn’t let inverted snobbery of musical taste or insecurity about our lack of comparative coolness interfere with enjoying playing music.

I mean, we would later find many other problems that could interfere with that enjoyment.

M. H. January 2001