

BORIS GARCIA

How bands begin is a perfect mix of the accidental - Keith meets Mick at a train station and spots the record under his arm, Bob hears Jerry playing banjo on a winter night, Paul decides to go to the Woolton Garden Fete and sees John - and the predestined; bands happen because they're meant to be, because they contain an energy that simply must find expression.

Boris Garcia isn't a person but a band, an ensemble that starts with what is called jamgrass - "We're all folkies at heart," remarked one band member - but also fuses a dozen strands of American music into a rich, ever-evolving whole. Bluegrass, jazz, rock, folk, Celtic, soul, blues - you can hear them all. It is a band that didn't even start out to be a band, merely a recording project. But once five old acquaintances started making music together, the music created its own momentum; they played for a friend's party, and realized they were a band, and haven't stopped since. Jeff Otto (vocals, bass, guitar, ukulele), Bob Stirner (vocals, guitar, bass), Gene Smith (vocals, harmonica, recorder, guitar), Bud Burroughs (mandolin, bouzouki, button accordion, Hammond organ) and Stephe Ferraro (drums, percussion) have been part of the Philadelphia performing music scene for the past 20 years, sharingbandstands - sometimes bands - and falling in and out of studio sessions with each other.

One day Jeff Otto decided to lay down some tracks for a demo reel that would promote his abilities to do soundtrack work for animation. This wasn't a high school kid at a laptop; Jeff had been a teacher and administrator at the Art Institute of Philadelphia for a number of years - he'd only recently returned to performing after a 14 year hiatus occasioned by the birth of his children, in fact. He'd recently been subbing in a band called Sunhill Down, and called on Gene Smith from that band to work on the demo project.

Gene brought many things to the project, but whimsy was in the lead - after all, he'd been a long-time member of Psychabilly, a band known to play, he said, "a Russian work song version of David Bowie's "Space Oddity," or the 100 mile an hour bluegrass version of "I Wanna Be Sedated." For one song, Gene thought they needed a Jerry Garcia style guitar lead, and recommended a guy he'd come across, Bob Stirner.

Stirner had spent twenty years in a Philly-area Dead cover band called Living Earth, and was the ideal guy for that particular cut. But as he

put it, "Being a Dead Head forces you to listen to other idioms, from Coltrane and Stockhausen to bluegrass and Celtic music too. I heard these quirky, interesting tunes from Jeff and Gene, and stuck around after that first cut was down."

As they evolved, they thought of another friend from the circuit, Bud Burroughs, another guy with lots of different angles – not so many bluegrass mandolin players play in bands like the multicultural Plasma, which featured African and Middle Eastern percussionists – and Bud.

Their jamming required a drummer, but not just any drummer; they needed Stephe Ferraro. Stephe had come to Philadelphia several years before to get his Master's in Music at Temple, then opened up a drum shop and settled down. But before leaving upstate New York, he'd been the local drummer of choice when organ jazz great Groove Holmes would come to town, and his improvisational chops were good enough to allow him to play with Dizzy Gillespie. His sophistication as a player was the final piece of the Boris puzzle.

The sessions for "Boris Garcia's Family Reunion" moved from a demo reel to a CD. The CD got people excited. Then a friend asked them to play at a pig roast. They played for their first audience as Boris Garcia, and looked at each other, and said, "Wow. We could be a band." And the rest is history – main stage at the Philadelphia Folk Festival, opening slots with New Riders of the Purple Sage, Little Feat, Railroad Earth, Jackson Browne, Hot Tuna, and David Bromberg.

Their second release, *Mother's Finest*, earned them even more applause for well-crafted songs and superior production. *Once More Into the Bliss* (out summer '08), their third effort, produced by Railroad Earth's Tim Carbone and featuring sit-ins by Buddy Cage (New Riders) and Donna Jean Godchaux-MacKay (Grateful Dead) will take them to the next level.

The name? Let Gene tell the story. "We were in the studio with a bunch of different guitarists. One of them was Tony Rice style, and the other was Flamenco/Middle Eastern. East meets West, and it was definitely odd, and Jeff said, "This is weird. This is like Boris Garcia's Family Reunion." A little tribute to Jerry Garcia, a little to Bullwinkle, and a lot of serendipity – that's Boris Garcia.

producer's notes on the soon to be released new album... The first time I heard the demos for "Once More Into The Bliss" I knew I had to

produce this record. The songs spoke to me immediately; hearing the full blown arrangements and production in my mind as I listened. It's a rare thing indeed to have three very different and talented songwriters in one band and still maintain a group personality. And the songs led us, almost demanding to be presented in the form you now hear. It was an intense journey to the heart of these songs. All too short but oh so sweet. And now they are loose on the world for all to dig. Here's hoping the world enjoys listening to them half as much as I had helping them be born. Tim Carbone, somewhere high over the great American west

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